A Prototype for Evidence-Based Programme Design for Reintegration

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INTRODUCTION

This is an introduction to UNIDIR's new prototype of the Evidence-Based Programme Design Tool. It was developed in response to the goal of the United Nation's Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, to create an evidence-based approach to achieving more positive results in reintegration programming.

Towards that end, UNIDIR and its project partner The Policy Lab launched a three-phase, multi-year research and development initiative. Our overarching goal is to assist United Nations field staff and their operational partners to achieve greater impact by design.[1]

Phase I of the project built a conceptual framework for working with evidence in the design of projects, programmes, and policies. A key output was "A Framework Document for Evidence-Based Programme Design on Reintegration" (Miller and Rudnick, UNIDIR, 2012, henceforth the "Framework Document") which provides a conceptual framework for working with evidence in the crafting of local programming solutions in order to better direct resources and processes towards creating impact.[2] That document introduces the difference between assessment approaches and design approaches to evidence-based programming, and explains the value of treating evidence-based design (EBD) as a diagnostic and design process for learning about crucial aspects of the world essential for crafting context-specific programming activities to achieve impact. In particular, it frames the challenge of working with evidence in organizational contexts, introduces the Strategic Design Model as a way of treating programme design as a goal-oriented activity that can and should be based upon evidence, and then concludes with an Agenda for Action.[3] Phase II of the project built a field-focused Evidence-Based Programme Design Tool prototype (the EBD prototype, or the prototype) to assist security, peacebuilding, and development professionals to create more locally valid and strategically directed projects, programmes, and policies. The EBD prototype itself is a key output. This document is an introduction to the prototype that:

- describes the sequence and functions of the design process;
- presents tools used in carrying out the programme design process itself;
- describes the outputs created during the design process; and
- explains the uses to which those outputs can be put in programming and project administration.

This document will also explain the next steps for UNIDIR and The Policy Lab in the development of the EBD prototype, and plans for piloting the prototype in operational contexts. Included in these activities are the production of a facilitator's guide to EBD, and the further refinement of tools and other materials used to assist field staff in conducting EBD as part of their project design and planning processes.

Phase III is designed to pilot test the EBD prototype in a field context with partner organizations from the IAWG that are intent on improving field-level performance and are eager to be involved in the early development of this new tool and process.

1 More information about UNIDIR's project can be found on the Project Page at http://www.unidir.org/programmes/process-and-practice/research-and-development-on-evidence-based-programme-design-for-reintegration-phase-ii.

2 http://www.unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/a-framework-document-for-evidence-based-programme-design-on-reintegration-396.pdf.

3 This agenda is part of UNIDIR's broader work on strategic design and public policy, described at http://www.unidir.org/programmes/process-and-practice/security-needs-assessment-protocol-snap-project-phase-ii/strategic-design-and-public-policy.

The EBD prototype is the product of two years of research, development, and testing and meets all three "solution criteria" established in the 2011 Framework Document. Namely, the prototype:

- will contribute to the creation of more effective programming (i.e. social impact) in local contexts;
- may facilitate results-based management processes for the benefit of greater accountability, transparency, and effectiveness; and
- can provide a new basis from which to build and facilitate interagency cooperation on shared strategic goals.

The IAWG's member organizations are the primary audience for this document. A key secondary audience is the national governments and partner organizations that are concerned with:

- maximizing political opportunities for local and national impact through better designed interventions;
- increasing value for money;
- creating new systems for the progressive improvement of professional conduct in post-conflict stabilization; and
- working to build internal mechanisms to collaborate on strategic goals across (or among) different bureaus (i.e. departments, sections, thematic areas, etc.).[4]

For recommendations concerning next steps needed to adopt, develop, and build capacity in EBD for the IAWG, its members, or the donor governments that support projects and programmes in field locations, see the separate UNIDIR document *Implementing Evidence-Based Design: Recommendations to the Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration.*

4 See, for example, the *Whole of Government Approaches to Fragile States: A DAC Reference Document from the OECD* (http://www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/37826256.pdf) as well as numerous developments in that area across concerned government on this theme and others, including the United Kingdom, Canada, and the Netherlands.

THE CHALLENGE OF DESIGNING FOR IMPACT

As defined by the United Nations General Assembly, "Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance" (Secretary-General, note to the General Assembly, A/C.5/59/31, May 2005).

Reintegration is thus an activity that is policy-directed. That direction may come from sources such as a United Nations Security Council resolution, a negotiated agreement between a government and a warring party, or an agreement between a national government and a United Nations country team. Whatever the source of instruction, reintegration is most commonly developed and carried out at the programming and project level by national actors, United Nations actors, and their implementing partners.

These programmes and projects, therefore, are under significant pressure to achieve political and socioeconomic impact. While reintegration is only a piece of the overall peacebuilding process, it is one of the few areas of activity that attend specifically and directly to the transitional juncture that enables a state to move from a war-time to a peace-time footing.

Done well, reintegration programmes can create a new basis for conflict transformation, transitional justice mechanisms, socioeconomic rehabilitation programmes, jump-starting of the economy and labour market, and for smoothing inter-communal relations. Done poorly, reintegration programmes can create unrealistic and unmet expectations among ex-combatants and communities, social imbalances, anger over real or perceived injustices, and increases in crime and political hostility. On a more strategic level, failure at this juncture can jeopardize years of peace negotiations, undermine new national and international frameworks put in place to assist with post-conflict stabilization, squander limited political space for action, and foster conditions that will make recovery and development harder or impossible.

The call for an evidence-based approach to reintegration is driven by numerous factors and sources, but most share a common theme—to achieve more with less:

- Donors want more impact for less money and less political risk (domestically and internationally).
- National (i.e. host) governments want to invest less time and take fewer political risks in cooperating with international actors that may be unpopular domestically.
- United Nations actors are being asked to deliver more than ever before, in ever-more challenging and dangerous environments, and with fewer resources.
- National implementing partners face resource pressure as well because every level of the power process puts increased demands on those further down.

The need to achieve more with less is unlikely to change any time soon. This imperative is not a result of ideology but rather of factors that will affect the United Nations for many years to come. These include the general downturn in the global economy, governments in donor states that are pressing for results while offering fewer resources, and a trend towards more direct, bilateral cooperation between states rather than moving funds through multilateral organizations.

These conditions drive policymakers to look for evidence of effectiveness in programming in order to guide them in making the best use of limited resources. It follows then that new attention has been

directed towards research that aims to demonstrate proof of impact, preferably through hard numbers. Likewise, there is now significant support for trying to derive lessons learned from programming failures or successes for use as a basis to guide policymaking, establish funding priorities, and issue field-level instructions. Implementing this "best practice" agenda (whether or not that term is used) is now a primary method for trying to improve on programming impact, and to direct the effective use of funds. As a result, recent years have seen an increase in financial support provided to monitoring and evaluation activities (M&E), and research aimed at developing guidelines and lessons learned.

However, as discussed in detail in the Framework Document, this best practice or "assessment approach" to improving programming—whereby past actions are analysed to improve future actions—does not immediately or formally address the very problematic that is central to fulfilling the goals of the evidence-based policymaking (or programming) agenda in the first place: *how* do we design for impact?

In this sense, design is a practice—i.e. an activity—carried out by project and programme staff who have been directed to achieve certain strategic goals through programming. It is certainly helpful to know what has worked in the past and to receive general guidelines and recommendations, but what project designers need is a process and a method to assist them in using knowledge as an asset in the strategic design of context-specific reintegration programmes.

There are many reasons, as we will explore in the next section, why this attention to *process* is so critical, especially given the current state of project and programme design practice.

Today, the organizational and procedural challenges to designing reintegration programmes are exacerbated by a significant qualitative shift in the contexts and actors concerned. Reintegration activities, originally intended for more stable and conducive post-conflict environments, are now requested in contexts that are both increasingly dangerous and unfamiliar. Similarly, these reintegration activities are now increasingly carried out among actors that see the United Nations and many "Western" non-governmental and international organizations as threats or legitimate targets.

The novelty of these challenges underscores two key facts about operational work and the United Nations' capacity to support it: at present *there is no base of evidence on best practices for reintegration in such contexts, nor is there a coherent and strategically directed research programme to create one*.[5] Such a programme of work needs to be put into place. However, the world cannot wait until the findings are in. The burden for delivery is now on project and programme designers, and it is immediate.

The approach presented here is, in many ways, a radical departure from other evidence-based approaches in that our project team did not direct attention towards specific reintegration practices, or identify what has or has not worked in the past. Nor did we focus on the otherwise helpful agenda of better communicating evidence and existing research to decision makers.[6] Instead we directed our attention towards the organizational systems and processes currently used to develop programming in actual everyday practice. A second area of attention concerned identifying barriers that must be understood and overcome in order to improve performance and impact.

Our findings indicate that improving the way programmes are developed will fundamentally alter the movement of knowledge to action in the service of strategic goals. By building this bridge at the field

5 The approach presently in use is to try to address thematically defined knowledge gaps, rather than strategically determined ones.

6 For progress in this area, see the *Policy Impact Toolkit* and supporting material by the Overseas Development Institute (UK) available at http://policyimpacttoolkit.squarespace.com.

level, and among project teams, we can stop trying to "push" information at project staff, and instead create a "pull" system that demands evidence for building a case, or theory, that a proposed set of actions could indeed yield the intended local impact. Such a "situated theory"[7] serves as a basis upon which to evaluate existing proposals for action, as well as a basis upon which to build a coherent, valid, and strategically directed programme of work.

All of us who need to do more with less must do better in designing the courses of action we plan to undertake. The process presented here, and the tools to support it, advance that shared agenda by:

- systematizing design practices;
- organizing the information resources both required and produced by such practices; and
- visualizing the use of evidence in our proposals for future action, not just in assessments of past action.

Given the objects of design we are concerned with—i.e. high-stakes policies, programmes, and projects, that affect people's lives and safety in fragile contexts—we need to build the best possible case for the solutions we propose. UNIDIR and The Policy Lab present Evidence-Based Design (EBD) as a means to do that.

7 D. Miller and L. Rudnick, "The Case for Situated Theory in Modern Peacebuilding Practice", *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2010.

BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING IMPACT IN PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

Every programme development process is a journey that carries the team from policy instructions to implementable activities. The process of programme development has three general phases that are not dependent on location, agency, or theme.

We refer to these three phases as:

> **Diagnose**—in which project teams ask questions, identify the problems to be addressed, and set goals to be achieved.
>
> **Design**—in which project teams create solutions for turning existing situations or conditions into preferred ones.
>
> **Deliver**—in which project teams deliver solutions to the administrative system, or else implement those solutions among beneficiaries (as appropriate).

In our research on programme development among United Nations agencies, we identified barriers in current practice to achieving impact during each of these phases. The following significant barriers were regularly observed and are recurring challenges to successful programming generally.

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVENESS IN DIAGNOSIS

1. Broad goals

Programming goals are a product of a mandate-driven system, and as such they are necessarily stated in terms that are appropriate to the level of policy they need to direct. The higher the level of policy, the broader the language; the lower the level, the more specific. At the United Nations Peacebuilding and Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) level, for example, goals (whether classified as objectives, outcomes, or priorities) are extremely broad, such as:

> To reduce inequities in and improve access to quality social services and to opportunities for decent, productive and sustainable livelihoods for the poor and vulnerable (UNDAF, objective 1, Philippines, 2012–2018).
>
> Vulnerable and disadvantaged groups get improved access to basic essential social services and programmes in an equitable manner (UNDAF, outcome 1, Nepal, 2013–2017).
>
> Improved governance, including the protection of human rights (UNDAF, priority 1, Iraq, 2011–2014).

These broad goals direct action to certain activities while also setting parameters for conduct in the country. What all policy directives have in common is a format that tells lower levels of authority what to do, but not necessarily how to do it. This emphasis on the “what” rather than the “how” eventually places the programme and project teams in a position of having to translate instructions into feasible, viable, responsible, and accountable actions to achieve those goals. Ironically, these mission-critical decisions are usually carried out at the very *lowest* level of authority, rather than commanding the attention of higher-levels.

Without instruction, tools, and other resources for making this translation, more junior staff most often reach for boilerplate solutions that have been approved in the past (whether or not they were successful for the beneficiaries) or otherwise draw on their own experiences, judgment, and intuition.

2. Accountability over impact

Programmes tend to be developed, then approved and funded, around the achievement of measurable results that are defined in terms of accountability in project planning and implementation. Under the guidance of results-based management (RBM), the establishment of Results Frameworks (which pertain primarily to the allocation of resources, and management of implementation) is often a first step—rather than complementary step—in developing a project or programme. Done this way, accountability to management results acts as the key driver of a project, rather than the achievement of social impact.[8]

3. Irrelevant information

A primary activity of any Diagnosis phase in programme development is conducting assessments. While many assessments help to establish information about the baseline conditions in a place, a good deal of research findings are either irrelevant to the achievement of the specific goal the programme is working towards, or are not applicable to the creation of strategic solutions. Because assessments are guided by general theories of reintegration, rather than explicit knowledge needs of a specific design process, there is often a mismatch between what we learn, and what we actually needed to know about, to make programming successful. The consequence is the creation of material that is "nice to know" but not "need to know," leaving an evidence gap in our design process that either goes unrecognized, or that is often discovered too late to address.

4. Invisible users

A key tenet in the design of products and services is "know your customer". There are of course important differences between "customers" and "beneficiaries" but there is value and wisdom in having knowledge of the day-to-day experiences, local preferences, and cultural requirements of the target beneficiary groups, as these matters are crucial for designing effective programmes for people. Programmes are not "good" simply on the basis of their logical frameworks—they are "good" when the underlying logic of action (i.e. the theory) makes the programme appropriate and valuable to those it is intended to serve. This is a matter of intentional and explicit alignment. Despite this need in programme development, there are presently no tools or assessments employed in the United Nations system that target an understanding of local sociocultural systems or the kinds of "user experience" knowledge necessary to assist in diagnosis. As a result, the real day-to-day lives of end users of programming (beneficiaries) are essentially invisible to those designing the programme.[9]

8 See United Nations Development Programme, Evaluation Office, *Evaluation of Results-Based Management at UNDP*, 2007, http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/thematic/RBM/RBM_Evaluation.pdf.

9 See the Source List at the end of the document for additional findings from the Security Needs Assessment Protocol project.

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVENESS IN DESIGN

5. Planning over design

Project planning is a management and administrative activity that focuses on the identification and allocation of resources, and tracks and facilitates project implementation. The more explicit and well organized the project, the easier it is to manage and administer. This leads to greater accountability, which is needed throughout the United Nations system. In current practice, project teams in the field (often supported by HQ) focus squarely on these elements. We have observed this evident focus in both the frameworks these teams are required to use, and in the practices these teams engage in on a daily basis as they develop projects.

In one way, this is perfectly understandable as operational agencies try to gain a greater measure of control over the quality of programmes and the system-wide application of policy. The focus on improved planning has been instrumental in organizational development—but planning is not design.

In contrast to planning, design is a set of activities that starts with questions, not answers, and then uses that subsequent learning to create distinct solutions to unique, particular, and specific challenges faced in different contexts. Stated differently, design is the crafting of particular solutions to particular problems, not the application of general solutions to particular problems.

A key task in developing a programme at the design phase is coming up with "design propositions"—i.e. solutions that will turn existing situations into preferred ones if (and only if) our theories are correct.

These are not theories *of* change, but theories *for* change.

Design therefore focuses on the development and testing of ideas, the generation and application of information, and the creation, modelling, and testing of proposed solutions.

The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), RBM frameworks, and other agency-specific tools give guidance to project teams on topics to investigate (i.e. assessments to conduct, such as livelihood assessments, post-conflict needs assessments, etc.) and tasks to carry out in the implementation of projects. But these are management and planning tools, not design tools. We found no tool that could give guidance in the conduct of a process for making explicit use of information in the creation of programming solutions. Put simply, once projects teams have assessments in hand, they still face the basic question of "Now what?".

The absence of such tools—and of recognition that they are needed—means that there is *no managerial or administrative "space" for engaging in design activities (i.e. time, money, support, and desire to hear the results of such a process)*. The reason there is no "design space" or tools to serve it is because the United Nations system has not yet recognized "design" as a key practice that is distinct from planning, and that leads to value and impact. This is not to advocate for design, but rather to recognize that it is already happening *without the tools and support it needs*.[10]

Staff may conduct these activities independently, in an ad hoc fashion, and on the basis of their own experiences and insights. But this is neither systematic in conduct, nor required by the system itself.

10 D. Miller and L. Rudnick's position paper, "Working with Design Junctures at the Knowledge-to-Action Nexus", produced for the 2010 conference on Managing by Design at the Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western University, introduces the terms design juncture and design space , and is available at https://www.academia.edu/807603/Working_with_Design_Junctures_at_the_Knowledge-to-Action_Nexus.

The result is that staff go directly from *problem to planning*, leading to project plans that are in effect erected without the guidance of a design process or having built and tested a theory *for* change.

This is why the "one-size-fits-all" problem keeps emerging: because it is built into the programme development process itself. It is a logical result of applying the few tools we have for conducting our work, and the fact that none of them are for design.

6. No distinction between levels of design

We observed that project or programme development involves working at many different levels—conceptual levels, administrative levels, and political levels to name a few. Different levels of action often require different activities. Designing programmatic structures, for example (i.e. what components a programme should have, how many, and how they should relate to each other) is different from designing the individual components themselves, or the specific activities that will be undertaken within that component.

Likewise, designing what happens at the beneficiary interface—between the service provider and the beneficiary— requires yet again different kinds of knowledge, activities, and guidance.

These very different levels of activity, authority, and decision-making serve different administrative and practical functions and are a natural and normal part of the process. Yet at present there is no distinction made between them, either in terms of methods, tools, or frameworks. We found that this presents real-world challenges for project teams—especially more junior teams—to sequencing and prioritization.

This confusion prevents staff from designing to the appropriate level of specificity for a given design objective and then *sticking to the structure* during implementation. Without this, there is a constant experience of "slippage", improvisation, and managerial uncertainty that leads to the proliferation of meetings and efforts to gain some control over the multiplying bureaucratic procedures. A tremendous amount of the stress and confusion of working in the field comes from this problem.

7. Invisible information

Standard practice for programming in any area (such as peacebuilding, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, or development) begins with conducting a series of assessments. This is a requirement in the IDDRS and similar standards on other matters. The information gathered is presented in an assessment report, which typically concludes with a set of recommendations. But there is no requirement to demonstrate that the information gathered in the assessments has been put to use in the design of projects or programmes. As a result, assessment findings are invisible in project or programme designs and logical frameworks, or merely sit beside them as context. It is therefore impossible to know if they were used properly, or at all.

8. No evaluation for design propositions

It is not possible to prove that a programme design will absolutely work in the future. There are too many uncertainties. However, it is possible to demonstrate that a design proposition is grounded on the best possible case for moving forward given the uncertainties. In current practice, we found that there is neither a requirement nor a system for quality testing of programming ideas for their suitability other than mere "sign off" by other organizations or higher administrative levels. A consultation-based

system, however, is not an evidence-based system for evaluating the quality of a proposed course of action.

Instead, programmes themselves are only evaluated for the impact after implementation and not for the quality of design before implementation. Though post-implementation evaluation is a crucial practice, the absence of an explicit practice for evaluating programme designs *prior* to implementation is one of the most serious and fundamental barriers to creating effective programming. It brings to mind the adage that "there is always time to do things twice, but never time to do them right".

9. Misplaced emphasis on past performance

Achieving impact is a function of the integrity of programme design. But securing funding from donors is a function of fulfilling past expectations by donors. Unfortunately, past performance is no indication of future success. The requirements for evidence should therefore be placed on proving the value of a proposed course of action, not simply on proving that it worked sometime in the past.

10. Impact not required

Concerted time and attention have been, and continue to be, dedicated to the establishment of results frameworks. While preferred "outcomes" are usually called for, social impact indicators are not always included in such frameworks. When these indicators are required, they are frequently developed through a "best guess" approach rather than in an informed or formal manner, undermining their relevance and role in achieving social impact.

At present staff do not have good guidance, processes, or tools for developing meaningful social impact indicators for the unique and particular circumstances they face.[11] Likewise, there is a pattern (among those Project Documents we reviewed) of indicators being *logically unconnected* to the activities in the programme plan. This lack of fidelity between expected cause and effect can undermine the programme's value as well as complicate the ability to manage it—in no small part because teams do not know what indicates that a change to project implementation is required.

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVENESS IN DELIVERY

11. Confusing frameworks

It is crucial that the frameworks used to impose order and clarity on complex undertakings, such as reintegration and other forms of programming, be clear and useable to staff. We have learned that the terminology and logical frameworks presently used are instead confusing to staff. While the RBM or PRINCE 2 definitions of outputs and outcomes may be widely known, application of these terms in practice is often the source of considerable confusion as teams sit down to work. This is exacerbated by the lack of distinction made between levels of design (as explained above in Barrier 6). The resulting process is often protracted and confusing, and the resulting logical frameworks and Project Documents fail to set up the needed relationships for conducting effective programming in terms of both implementation and impact.

11 Approaches to developing meaningful social impact indicators are being developed elsewhere but not yet systematically required or included in United Nations work practices.

12. Complicated cooperation

Another effect of confusing frameworks is that they can make it challenging to coordinate with other partners on project or programme design, especially towards the end of impact. This seems to be the case both in terms of coordination with United Nations partners and non-United Nations partners alike. United Nations partners have different management frameworks to which they are accountable. Coordinating different mandates, roles, and internal requirements between or among agencies can be laborious, and often results in project plans that focus on ensuring correct alignment of management frameworks, allowing the objective of creating social impact to fall from view.

In other cases, when the delivery of assistance is ultimately provided by local partners (non-governmental organizations, international organizations, etc.), United Nations project teams face the same problem that donors do—namely, there is often a lack of visibility into the actual activities these agencies are engaged in and what their own logic is for doing things in their chosen manner.

13. Over-burdened M&E

M&E is designed to track implementation and measure impact of policies and programming activities in order to influence future action. However, just as information does not apply itself, the results of M&E activities (such as quantitative evidence of impact, sets of good practices and recommendations) cannot improve programming on their own. Too often good evaluations fail to achieve uptake in programme design because they are either difficult to apply, or are not applicable to the programme design challenge at hand. Their findings must be put to use in some way in the design, or redesign, of programming activities (whether explicit and systematized, or implicit and ad hoc) in order for their benefit to be felt.

In recent years, M&E practitioners and organizations have turned concerted attention to developing strategies or techniques for creating “policy impact”. But M&E results are sometimes looked to as a source for programming solutions. Ultimately, the responsibility of programme design, while a cooperative activity in the best circumstances, rests with the programme or project team who must implement it. Yet, in the absence of a design process, we found no other process in use for ensuring (or showing) the use of evaluation findings in programming development.

Bringing M&E together with design practices can help to improve the value and uptake of both. But a mechanism will be needed for achieving this.

THE CONDITIONS THIS CREATES

These insights describe a state of affairs that presents several significant barriers to effective programme and project development, and impede the ability to design for impact.

For staff—whose central task is to find ways to implement policy and programming objectives in locally relevant and effective ways—this amounts to a set of conditions in which there is a lack of guidance on how to do exactly that. Without a process to guide the mobilization of various information and knowledge resources for the achievement of goals and the creation of impact, many such resources that are developed go unused, and staff are left to programme on the basis of opinion, instinct, or prior examples, regardless of contextual relevance.

These challenges are exacerbated by the fact that often it is the most junior staff who are left to make the most important decisions for impact. While higher-level programming management decisions (e.g. concerning objectives, resources, time frames, partnerships, and political matters) are made by more

senior staff and also by committee (as part of the cluster system), the closer programming decision-making gets to the beneficiary interface (e.g. what kinds of activities, conducted in what ways, and by which partners) the further they get from senior decision makers. Hence, those with the least experience are frequently tasked to undertake locally crucial design decisions for creating impact, but in the absence of a process, or guidance, for doing so.

In addition, the mobility system at the United Nations leads to rapid turnover rates of international staff in field offices. This means that continuity is difficult to achieve except at a general level of implementation. Likewise, the most challenging field locations usually see the greatest staff turnover, and of course these are the places that often need the most assistance. Formal systems and methods become that much more important when professional experience and continuity—and the grounds for judgment these create—are in short supply.

For the resulting programmes, these barriers lead to projects and programmes that are often disconnected from local needs and contexts. While the existing management and planning frameworks may enable staff to deliver on donor-preferred results, and maybe even on accountability, we know that these interventions frequently miss the mark when it comes to local relevance, impact, and effectiveness.

THE RESPONSE

In light of these findings, we determined that any EBD tool would need to be developed with the following key features:

1. EBD MUST BE BOTH USER-FRIENDLY AND ORGANIZATION-FRIENDLY

Field teams are often working at maximum capacity. New guidelines and directives seem to show up every day. And—because of the sociopolitical contexts—goal posts always seem to be moving. To make their work better, we also need to make it easier. For this reason, we have built EBD to be a support to existing work practices rather than a replacement or added burden. We have done this by working with field staff and—as with product development in the business world—building solutions around real-world conditions. Being user-friendly, though, is not enough. EBD also needs to be organization-friendly, so that the EBD process itself can work with existing management and planning frameworks.

2. EBD MUST BE SYSTEMATIC, REPEATABLE, AND SCALABLE WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

By creating a process to follow and a set of tools to use, design can become a set of staff activities that can be planned for and a set of teachable skills that can be evaluated and mainstreamed. In this way, the benefits of systematic design can be organizationally adopted and scaled up, much in the way that RBM systems were incorporated into programme development.

3. EBD MUST PUT IMPACT AT THE CENTRE OF PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

RBM has helped management and administrative systems gain greater control over the alignment of expenditures to outputs and overall outcomes. EBD now needs to direct work practices around the creation of impact indicators and the means of achieving them in unique and distinct contexts rather than universal or typical ones. It is essential to have a clear view of the impact desired, what kinds of steps can help bring it about, and indications that this is being achieved in locally meaningful ways. EBD must therefore help practitioners both articulate meaningful impact goals, and create locally meaningful indicators in an informed and evidence-based way.

4. EBD MUST MAKE EVIDENCE REQUIRED

EBD must give clear and direct support that guides staff through the why and how of using evidence in design, builds their capacity to do so, and creates space within existing programme cycles for such activities to take place when needed. EBD must therefore be administratively required and supported to both direct and empower staff to perform it.

Based on our user-research conducted with field practitioners, we decided that such features could be realized best through a facilitated design process, which would be repeatable but adaptable, and which could be useful at a variety of levels of expertise and administrative authority. We also concluded that the process should explicitly advance practitioners in the task of creating the administrative outputs necessary to project development.

We therefore designed the programme and project design process—based on our conceptual framework for EBD—by drawing from a variety of research and design techniques, and always with our users' jobs and contexts in view.

We drew principles and techniques from communication studies, strategic studies, organizational behaviour, and design thinking. Our multidisciplinary team adopted an integrated design approach to shape a set of modules and activities that would guide participants through the steps of an EBD process.

We then tested this process in a workshop setting to see if conducting some of the meetings that already take place as standard practice in this new way could bring value to the programming process itself, and to the kinds of results it might produce.

This process of prototype testing was carried out three times: once in Geneva, once in Hargeysa, and once in Nairobi, with findings and feedback from participants used to make revisions after each test.

The resulting prototype process and tools are presented in the next sections.

INTRODUCING THE EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMME DESIGN PROTOTYPE

The Evidence-Based Programme Design Tool prototype is a facilitated design process created to take place at key junctures of a project or programme cycle. This process is supported by a set of materials that are used in a series of guided workshops as well as independent tasks.

The tangible outputs created by this process create the elements that culminate in an Evidence-Based Programme Design document. This document can then serve in a clear and directed way as a basis for, or contribution to, a range of key administrative tasks central to programming within the United Nations system. These include RBM tasks, resource mobilization, fundraising, reporting, M&E, risk assessment, and risk management. In this way, the EBD prototype is designed to work directly with M&E processes to ensure the effective use of productive M&E results.

The EBD workshop formats are suggested as a way of making more effective use of, or as a support to, the current system of consultations and document drafting that presently are conducted on a fairly ad hoc basis to advance teams through programme development.

At the present stage of development, these materials include, in paper and digital form:

- A Process Template—providing an overview of the EBD process;
- A Draft Facilitator's Guide—providing guidance on how to conduct EBD workshops and exercises;
- Facilitation Tools—materials used to conduct and facilitate workshops and conduct specific exercises;
- Capture Tools—materials used to culminate the work produced in a session or from a task; and
- Output Templates—materials that mobilize the outputs of the EBD process for a range of administrative tasks central to programming.

In the next four pages, we introduce the Facilitation Tools, Capture Tools, and Output Template prototypes to conduct the three main phases of the EBD process—Diagnose, Design, and Deliver.

Each of these three phases is performed by a set of steps. For each step, we illustrate the tools involved, explain why each step is undertaken, describe what activities are performed, list what materials are used to assist the design teams to move through the process, and document what outputs result from that exercise to help progress to the next step.

Please note that this section is presented as an introduction to the EBD prototype, the tools used, and the sequence followed to arrive at the Programme Design Document. At a later date, the Process Guide and Facilitator's Guide will be produced to support implementation of the process by facilitators and field teams.

1. DIAGNOSE

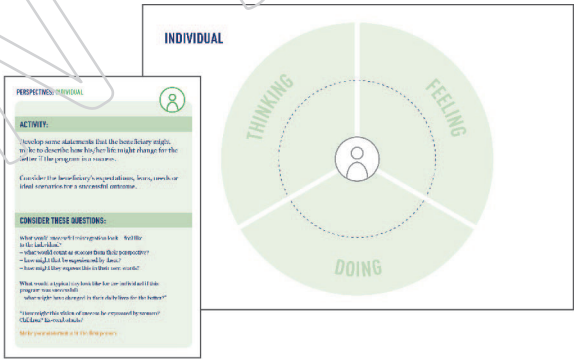
Goal Setting

why: To orient program design around social impact outcomes as well as RBM planning objectives.

activity: Identify the goal statement directing the program and re-frame it in terms of a social impact objective.

what: Goal statement capture poster.

output: Refined goal statement.



Beneficiary Perspectives

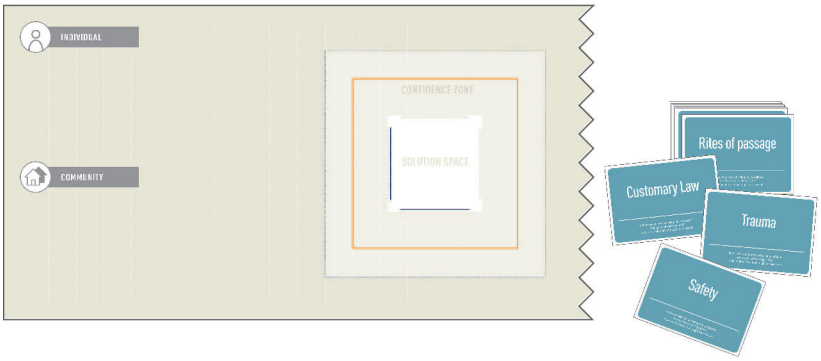
why: To help identify differences in stakeholder perspectives; to help translate the programme goal into a set of possible social impact outcomes later in the process.

activity: Identify what the successful fulfilment of the programme or project goal (e.g. reintegration, rehabilitation, improved security) would look like from the individual beneficiary and the local community perspectives.

what: Activity cards.

output: A number of first-person statements describing successful fulfilment of the goal, in terms of positive changes in the lives of beneficiaries and communities; a basis for social impact indicator development.

DIAGNOSE (continued)



Knowledge Mapping

why: To assemble the key building blocks needed to design for impact; to ensure these are selected for both strategic and local relevance; to visualize information to make it available for use throughout the process.

activity: Determine what needs to be known about beneficiaries and their local context in order to achieve the successful fulfilment of the programme or project goal from the individual beneficiary and the local community perspectives; prioritize information; inventory available resources; identify knowledge gaps; develop first draft research plan.

what: Inquiry prompt cards and knowledge map/ workspace.

output: An information inventory; identified knowledge gaps; information prioritization; initial research questions for further research and knowledge mapping.

2. DESIGN

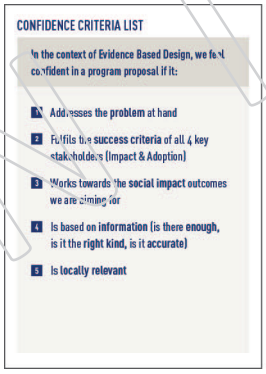
Proposition Building

why: To create programming propositions on the basis of critical information for programming success.

activity: Using the information gathered, develop programming propositions that address the stated goal, and describe the targeted social impact.

what: A5 cards for developing programming propositions.

output: A collection of information-based programming propositions that can be discussed, reviewed, developed, and shortlisted by the group.



Proposition Testing – Using Evidence

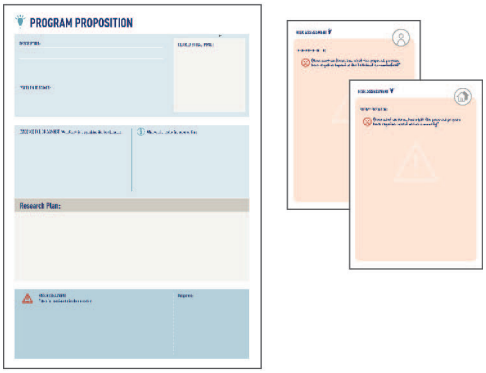
why: To ensure propositions are accepted, modified, or rejected based on evidence.

activity: Present evidence and use it to make a case to the group, either for or against, the proposition; use the Confidence Criteria to evaluate the case; select propositions for further development.

what: A reference poster outlining the criteria by which we will measure our confidence in propositions as they are developed (used together with propositions cards and knowledge map).

output: Evidence-based proposition statements that are either (1) demonstrated to be supported by evidence on the basis of Confidence Criteria, allowing the programme or policy design team to move on to the next stage of the process; or (2) are demonstrated to be insufficient—and therefore in need of rejection or refinement—from the point of view of the Confidence Criteria, thereby directing the team to establish a plan for next steps to correct the problem.

DESIGN (continued)



Proposition Documentation and Review

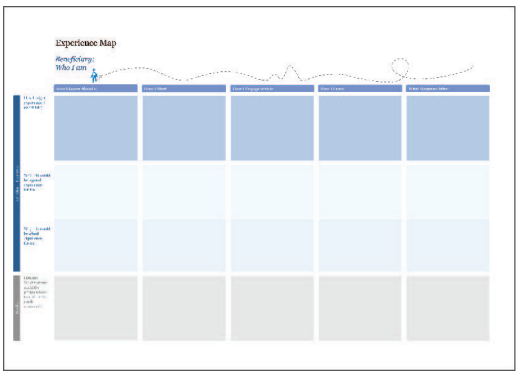
why: To document and assess the state of programme development in a concise, transparent, and organizationally productive manner for the benefit of advancing the design process; To record the ideas being used to support action, and the tasks needed to advance the process, so that the use (or absence) of evidence is clear and demonstrable.

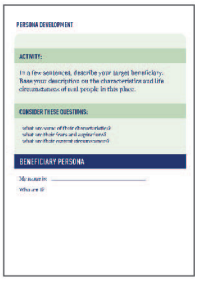
activity: Document shortlisted propositions from prior step, supporting evidence, and research plan/action points to improve confidence if needed; conduct basic risk assessment; identify mitigating steps.

what: A capture poster for work-in-progress programme propositions, plus supplemental activity cards to help conduct concurrent risk assessment.

output: Documentation of programme proposition, supporting or rejecting evidence, research plan, and potential risks and proposed mitigating steps.

DESIGN (continued)





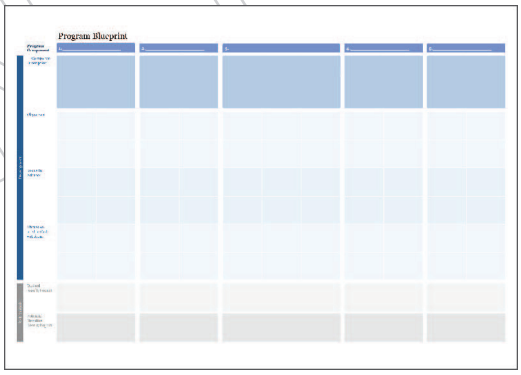
Experience Design

why: To help conceptualize the activity or service from the point of view of beneficiary and/or community experience, in order to: (1) discover challenges, benefits and risks to beneficiaries and communities; (2) ensure that the proposed activities respond to these findings; and (3) address the impact goals of the project.

activity: Using information from the beneficiary perspectives (tool #2) as well as additional information (about beneficiary perspectives, contexts, needs, social cultural systems, etc.), create a description of how a particular beneficiary would experience a proposed activity or service.

what: Persona Development Cards; Beneficiary Journey Maps; Blueprint worksheet for designing the beneficiary interface or experience.

output: Activity Blueprint; action points and next steps.



Project or Programme Blueprinting

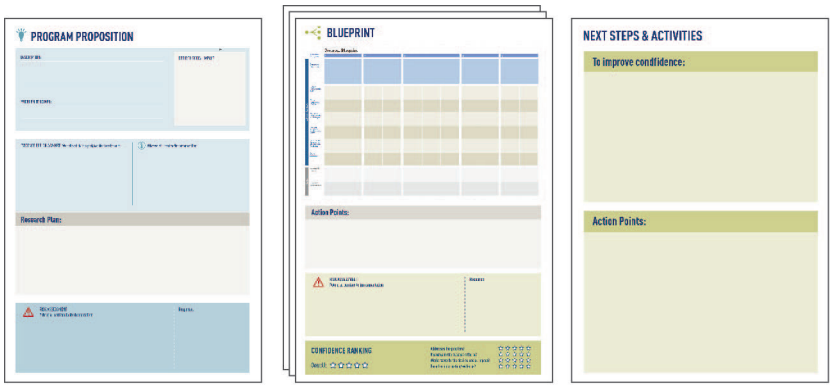
why: To ensure that project or programme development is informed by relevant evidence to the stated goals, ensuring a more logical and practical relationship between preferred activities and expected impacts.

activity: Create a blueprint of the elements of the project or programme needed to deliver the service, activity, or experience indicated by the proposition.

what: Blueprint worksheet and prompt cards for designing components or activities through visual mapping.

output: Project or Programme Blueprint; action points and next steps.

3. DELIVER



Project or Programme Documentation

why: To create a clear, user-friendly, and easy-to-reference document that records the findings, experiences, and conclusions of the EBD process with a standardized documentation tool. The EBD Programme Design Document creates transparency regarding the use (or lack) of evidence in programme designs; enables review and revision during planning processes and also during monitoring and evaluation procedures (both before and after the project or programmes is concluded); enables vertical communication in the management chain, and lateral communication with partner organizations; supports evidence- based decision-making when appropriate; and supports project management tasks such as developing research agendas, commissioning research, and assessing risk.

activity: Assemble elements created by the EBD process (all prior outputs); document according to template; apply EBD criteria to rank confidence; develop and record next steps.

what: Capture posters and document templates for assembling the EBD elements into an Evidence-Based Programme Design document.

output: Evidence-Based Programme or Project Design Document.

Uses

The EBD Programme Design Document assembles the components of EBD with a view to being useful for a range of administrative tasks and requirements, such as programme planning, resource and management decision-making, donor and stakeholder communication and reporting, and coordination with implementing partners and subcontractors, among other matters.

Linking EBD with M&E

Well developed and evidence-based programme designs can positively contribute to effective field-level impact. Likewise, robust M&E is crucial to improving the impact of programming as well. Thus far, however, the relationship between better designing, and better monitoring and evaluation has been insufficiently addressed . Explicitly informing the basis for assessment with the programme design can create more value in the monitoring of activities and the evaluation of both process and impact.

Likewise, by creating demand for evidence in the crafting of propositions for action, EBD itself creates an explicit and procedural bridge for the insights and findings produced by M&E. Assessments can then be more easily mobilized, to provide direct value-added to design activities, when EBD methods and M&E procedures are aligned.

Through our research and development we have learned how this process—when supported by specific materials, facilitation, and guidance—can help practitioners in several ways. It can:

- help people to visualize, organize, and use information in new and productive ways;
- stimulate new ways of working with existing information resources, and identify strategic knowledge gaps;
- help to motivate and organize collaboration among colleagues;
- direct, structure and advance participants through collaborative meetings in better ways;
- help to ensure progress towards the goal (e.g. a programme design);
- produce resources that have a range of uses (i.e. organizationally, procedurally, politically, etc.);
- build better transparency around programming decisions, so that course corrections, should they be needed, can be informed instead of merely reactive or based on trial and error only; and
- maintain an impact-driven and strategic approach to programme design.

Importantly, we have also seen that the EBD process helps to ensure that time is spent in productive, progressive, and goal-driven ways, and also provides tools and resources for troubleshooting when challenges arise (such as political challenges and shifting contexts).

In addition, while a “master sequence” is represented here, we note that a trained facilitator can adapt the process for use at various junctures of the programme cycle in order to assist teams in, inter alia, gaining clarity of purpose in the face of changing conditions, and making adjustments in response to ongoing or mid-course M&E findings—two common and crucial situations faced regularly by country teams.

NEXT STEPS

We gained important insights about the usability and viability of the EBD prototype when we brought it to the field to observe how participants made use of the tool and participated in the process. Some of these insights were used to modify the tool specifically. Others, however, provide insight into EBD more generally as an approach to programming within the United Nations system.

KEY INSIGHTS

1. There are new concepts to be learned

EBD represents a shift in thinking from planning to designing. For many people this means learning new concepts and thinking in new ways. We found that most were capable of making the shift and met the challenge willingly because it spoke to a distinction they could understand even though it had not been explicitly made to them before.

2. There are new skills to be taught

Using information and evidence in explicit and transparent ways in the development of programme designs is a brand new activity for many if not most field staff. There are two broad reasons for this. The first is because it is not a required practice, therefore few people have experience in doing it. The second is that many local staff have been tasked with implementation of instructions, not in the design of solutions—even if they act as de facto designers on their teams.

3. Capacity improves rapidly

We observed a rapid improvement in the ability of participants over the course of the workshops to make key moves in creating evidence-based designs, such as identifying knowledge gaps of strategic value for design, learning to use information in the evaluation of programming propositions, and orienting to local contexts on the basis of information.

4. Visual materials help

Having an explicit visual process helps participants make explicit use of evidence in creating programming and evaluating programming propositions. But importantly, this also helps them to communicate upwards (to both management and donors alike) the use or absence of evidence in the design of a project or programme. In addition, having clear "capture" tools (tools to visually record, keep present, and therefore make available key pieces of information and evidence throughout the process) ensures that key pieces of information can be used for the relevant purpose.[12]

5. Workshop outputs create immediate value for teams

Each module of the EBD process is designed to create an element of an evidence-based programme or project design. As a result, the outputs can be utilized in the administrative tasks for which teams are responsible.

12 For more information on the value of visualization techniques for working with data in meaningful ways, see the work of E. Tufte (1997, 1990, 1986).

6. Training sessions are valuable, and a modular approach will be more valuable

A key finding from prototype testing was that EBD would yield the most value for teams if it were mapped on to the project cycle and conducted at key junctures, as opposed to the artificial one-week training scenario.

PHASE III: THE PILOT

These insights help to direct our attention for the third phase of UNIDIR's EBD project. In the pilot testing phase of the project, UNIDIR and The Policy Lab (henceforth "the UNIDIR team") will work with a field partner to pilot the EBD prototype in the context of an actual programme cycle by conducting EBD activities and providing guidance at relevant programme design junctures as they are faced by the field team.

While the objective of the testing that took place during Phase II was to contribute to the design of the EBD prototype itself, the pilot testing to be carried out in Phase III tests the viability of the prototype now produced in the contexts for which it was designed, and addresses the insights listed above. Further, working closely with a field team throughout a project cycle will also provide an opportunity to build capacity at the field level, and provide information needed in order to evaluate scalability and suggest steps needed to scale up, should the decision to move forward be taken.

There are four core activity areas involved in the Pilot Phase, which is presently envisioned to take place over 18 months from its start date. Each is outlined below.

Core Activity 1: Consultation and adaptation

The first step of the Pilot Phase is to cooperatively design the Pilot with the field partner (hosting field office). For the Pilot, the UNIDIR team will map the EBD steps and tools to the field partner's cycle of programme and project development to ensure relevant sequencing and timing of the EBD activities. In this way, support can be provided to teams in as seamless and productive a manner as possible. A series of consultations will be held between the UNIDIR team and the field partner to adapt the prototype to the particular schedule, design needs, programming objectives, and field context.

The UNIDIR team will also undertake an elaboration of the present facilitation guide to adapt it for wider use, and for capacity-building during the Pilot.

Core Activity 2: Piloting the EBD Prototype

The UNIDIR team will carry out the EBD process as discussed above, according to the schedule of activities agreed with the field partner. Activities include on-site facilitation of EBD workshops at key design junctures, guidance on EBD tasks conducted independently between workshops, assistance in developing research plans and terms of reference, and creating programme design documentation.

Core Activity 3: Research on aligning RBM systems and EBD process

At present, the EBD prototype produces outputs that can assist RBM systems to fulfil their objectives. However, as no full cycle of EBD has yet been tested, research is still needed to examine how the relevant logical frameworks and Project Documents from the RBM system work in cooperation with the outputs from an EBD process. Therefore, this component of the Pilot

Phase attends specifically to conducting the research necessary for aligning and coordinating RBM and EBD processes so that they are mutually productive in creating a "total programme".

Core Activity 4: Modification of EBD Prototype as needed

The primary purpose of the Pilot is to learn how the EBD prototype functions in the "real world" design scenarios it has been built to address. On the basis of what is learned throughout the testing experience, the team will make needed modifications to the form, order, or performance of different steps in the process, as well as to the tools used to support them. The result will be an EBD Tool, available to IAWG–DDR members, partners, and other relevant field practitioners.

ROLLING OUT AND SCALING UP

Evidence-Based Design is a long-term research and development programme with the potential for far-reaching impact and evolving capacity in the design and delivery of field-level programming. As such, it is a programme of work undertaken as a direct support for improving the work carried out by implementing agencies, and as a "force multiplier" across the United Nations system.

UNIDIR's refinement and roll out of the tool is therefore not anticipated as the end of the story but the first major instalment in a new one—a story about organizational change and the global improvement in the design of programmes and projects. The final deliverable of the Pilot Phase will be (as above) a viable, functional, and productive contribution to United Nations field teams. However, it will then be up to the IAWG's 22 member organizations to decide how best to move forward with Evidence-Based Design for their organizational and programming objectives.

Should there be interest and support for EBD, then a cooperative agenda of work between UNIDIR and its fellow IAWG members should be established. Such an agenda should involve efforts to further test EBD in different organizational settings, to work on capacity-building, and to bring practices to scale.

In the coming year, UNIDIR will be advancing a strategic agenda that will benefit field, HQ, and donor cooperation to better ensure a coordinated and shared approach to achieving better impact by design.

CONCLUSION

Close to a decade on, the 2005 definition of reintegration established by the United Nations General Assembly still remains viable. What is better appreciated now, however, is that this community-focused, local-level process requires not only universal best practices to help direct administrative conduct, but also procedural best processes to ensure that we are actually designing for the impact we intend in the distinct, particular, and often unique contexts that characterize real-world reintegration challenges.

The IAWG–DDR has made a valuable contribution to the United Nations system as a whole in recognizing the need for an approach to evidence-based programming on reintegration. There remains a strong need to build a base of evidence for good and best practices on reintegration, so that they may be encouraged and taught. It is an excellent sign that numerous research projects outside the United Nations are advancing this agenda. But, as noted above, creating evidence of programming effectiveness is not enough.

In this report and others, we have discussed the challenge of how to move knowledge to action in both programme and policy design. Our assertion, frankly put, is that knowledge does not apply itself. Even in the face of the best research, or the most reliable evidence, we still need a way of bringing information to bear on our designs for action. Nowhere is this more important than in instances in which human safety and well-being are the focal concerns. The present trend of investment in the development and resourcing of new platforms—such as Informational Management Systems, web-based platforms for collaboration, etc.—is a welcome and needed development. However, the full value of these resources is destined to remain unrealized if there is no process to help mobilize and effectively use the information they gather and share as a strategic asset in programme design.

The EBD prototype presented here was developed in response to this lesson learned. It compliments existing efforts to better communicate knowledge and research findings to decision makers, and also the more technical efforts now in development within the United Nations and elsewhere to gather, organize, and disseminate research for use in crafting solutions to complex problems.

For reintegration programming in particular, the EBD prototype was developed to help practitioners build that crucial bridge between guidance, such as that found in IDDRS or lessons learned, the information generated and shared through assessments and the various resources discussed above, and the problem-solving challenges they face. We learned from practitioners themselves that a central problematic of their jobs is finding ways to implement broad policy goals in locally effective and hopefully meaningful ways. Therefore, we designed EBD to give teams a systematic method by which to adapt and innovate in response to the specific challenges and local particularities of the different contexts in which they work.

Unlike other design approaches that emphasize the creative aspects of design, the EBD approach makes creativity accountable to consequences—something that many other design methods fail to do. UNIDIR's EBD prototype does this by using evidence in programme design itself—before implementation, rather than after. Here, evidence is used to create new programming propositions, but also to evaluate and, when relevant, to adapt or reject existing ones. This use of evidence is transparent, systematic, strategic, and designed to add value. As a set of work practices, the prototype can add value whether implemented on a case-by-case basis, or brought to scale.

The EBD prototype is not presented here as the unique or final answer to the challenge of designing for impact. Rather, it is a first and solid step towards progress in an area that has, until now, been unattended to by organizations aiming to achieve greater results from their actions and investments.

We believe the EBD prototype will assist teams to make rapid progress towards improved programming impact. We also believe that a wider commitment to an EBD agenda has the potential to fundamentally alter, for the better, the means by which field teams create and implement in-country solutions, so that they may achieve the impact they—and their beneficiaries—want to see in the world.

SOURCE LIST

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