

***Integrating Lived Everyday
Experience into M&E Practices:
The Grounded Accountability Model
(GAM)
- Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI)***

Within international cooperation, traditional Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices often centre around showcasing a programme's success and results through knowledge production methods aiming to generate tangible, accurate, valid, and unbiased evidence. Prioritising these methods has frequently led to the exclusion of local communities, particularly in conflict-affected contexts, reducing their lived experiences to statistics or quantifiable outputs or limiting their contribution to knowledge generation. Programmes working around the issues of peace, justice and reconciliation are usually measured through top-down, expert-driven, and western-led models imposed on the global south.

The Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) project offers an innovative alternative based on community-driven indicators that reflect local experience and understanding. EPI acknowledges that while the current development cooperation system requires quantitative metrics to convey effectiveness to donors, it is possible to co-create the measurement tools needed for that purpose in collaboration with those being assessed. EPI holds significance not only in measuring impact and tracking results, but also in leveraging community-generated indicators to achieve consensus on key issues and empower communities to advocate for

their needs.

The Grounded Accountability Model (GAM) emerges from EPI's efforts to tailor its methodology for CSOs and practitioners while showcasing its value and effectiveness to donors, multilateral and bilateral organisations, and governments.

“The motivation behind GAM was to try to pass on the knowledge we have gained through EPI, through applying it and developing it in the academy to the practitioner world.”

Pamina Firchow, EPI's Founding Executive Director

Taking it a step further, GAM piloted the EPI Methodology in organisations operating at various levels, including an international NGO (Search for Common Ground), a national NGO (Asociación MINGA in Colombia), and a local organisation (COSURCA in the Cauca region of Colombia). This approach allowed them to assess whether

“it looks different if you adapt the EPI tool to a national NGO versus a community or a regional NGO, and how does that look different? How might they adapt it differently? How might they use it differently? What are the different challenges involved? And then, does it matter if they do different kinds of projects in different sectors (e.g. human rights, security, etc?)”

**Pamina Firchow, EPI's Founding
Executive Director**

The first step in implementing GAM involved training practitioners from each organisation to become “EPI experts.” These experts then adjusted their learning to suit their organisations’ specific goals, aligning with their challenges and capacities. This means that GAM and its adaptation of the EPI methodology differ for each organisation. This diversity was channelled into creating a community of practice among the organisations, creating a platform for sharing insights and knowledge throughout the process.

Some challenges encountered during this process revolved around the diverse cultural backgrounds of each organisation and the communities they serve. This highlighted that while conflict is universal, its expressions vary across various contexts. It also emphasised the significance of acknowledging diverse perspectives on peace and coexistence, enriching the overall experience. An ongoing concern related to the approach promoted by EPI involves what constitutes genuine participation and whether the data collected accurately represents the community. It is crucial to ensure that the indicators created genuinely reflect the communities’ realities and are not susceptible to being easily co-opted.

That is why it was essential for practitioners to adhere to specific commitments to implement GAM effectively. Practitioners committed to conducting a consensus-driven, inclusive and transparent process with the diverse groups representing the local community, consulting these communities on their preferred engagement methods, setting expectations, mutually agreeing on how to utilise the data and sharing its ownership, developing localised and meaningful indicators aligned with its needs and aspirations and integrating them into the organisation’s monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts.

Practitioners and academics in international cooperation, peacebuilding and other fields have recognised the necessity for participatory approaches to monitoring and evaluation, emphasising the importance of involving every day people in developing indicators.

GAM's implementation in Colombia

MINGA is a human rights-focused organisation working on social movements and environmental justice in Colombia. During GAM's implementation, they engaged with leaders from a peasant organisation active in various municipalities of the *Macizo Colombiano* subregion in Nariño. MINGA adapted the EPI methodology by simultaneously

drafting and verifying the indicators and streamlining the process. The participants collectively reviewed, confirmed, or discarded proposed indicators, ensuring clarity in wording and allowing participants to vote for the best choices. The resulting indicators reflected community priorities and understanding of peace, including recognition of peasants' rights, well-maintained roads, access to land for young farmers, absence of exploitation, and university outreach to territories.

COSURCA, a cooperative of coffee bean producers in the Cauca region, was another key player in the EPI methodology's adaptation. The ASPROBALBOA association, which integrates COSURCA and comprises 174 families from the municipality of Balboa, was selected to participate. Other rural organisations (*Lirios del Campo* and ASMUSAN) not associated with COSURCA also participated as control groups. The COSURCA team had participants write their answers to the moderator's guiding questions before discussing and constructing indicators based on those responses. The information gathered from focus groups was organised into Excel tables, and participants were allowed to make adjustments or corrections. As part of the adaptation, a printed form of the indicators was provided to participants for anonymous voting. Due to logistical and security issues, this process was done in one day.

The process produced valuable insights into COSURCA's operations, informing the development of tailored evaluations and strategies aligned with the association's specific needs and priorities. Additionally, the unexpected involvement of members from other associations facilitated the establishment of new channels for cooperation and communication.

The GAM's experience in Colombia on national and local level, as well as in an international level with Search for Common Ground, demonstrated that the EPI methodology is not a rigid tool, but a flexible one that could be tailored to the specific needs of different organisations and adapted to its unique context. All three organisations have seen tangible results, as they've integrated certain aspects of the adapted EPI methodology into their daily operations and evaluation strategies. Likewise, they have used elements from EPI in other projects' evaluations beyond GAM, meaning it is a helpful and valuable tool for organisations regarding donor accountability.

Moreover, the GAM project was able to foster a community of practice among these organisations, and this was the cohesive force for the entire project. There are ongoing plans to sustain this community of practice and growing interest in replicating this experience in other countries in the global south.

Learnings:

The GAM's adaptation in Colombia underlines its significance in community engagement. It demonstrated that ICSSOs operating in intricate environments can tailor the EPI methodology to gather data in a participatory and culturally sensitive manner, all while upholding donor accountability standards.

- ▶ It is important to spend time discussing and agreeing on key ways of working/operating and aligning to local challenges and capacities before collecting data.
- ▶ M&E practices can prioritise meaningful dialogue and engagement with everyday people from targeted communities.
- ▶ Community created indicators are susceptible to local co-option. For them to genuinely reflect the community's realities, a consensus-driven, inclusive and transparent process with the diverse groups needs to be carefully managed (not just the outcome).
- ▶ Diverse perspectives on peace and coexistence should be openly discussed, for they enrich the overall experience, even if it slows down the measurement process. Community members need to be clear on what they are monitoring through co-created definitions.
- ▶ ICSSOs can advocate for bilateral and multilateral donors to actively support the integration of community-generated indicators into M&E frameworks.
- ▶ Fostering a community of practice proves to be a powerful method for uniting organisations. Investing in creating online platforms enables organisations to facilitate the ongoing sharing of insights when implementing innovative practices, including investing in regional communities of practices with similar cultural backgrounds.