



## **Conflict Resolution & Evaluation Meeting Summary of Feedback**

The Conflict Resolution & Evaluation (CRE) Meeting hosted by INCORE, took place at Aberfoyle House, University of Ulster on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> and Friday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2002. The CRE Meeting brought together twenty-four participants from a variety of backgrounds (for full details see Participant Directory) to further the thinking and practice of evaluation methodology in the field of conflict resolution.

At the close of the CRE Meeting seventeen participants completed a Participant Feedback Questionnaire upon which the following document is based. In summary, several themes emerged from Participant Feedback:

- Participants felt that the interactive process designed to engage participants *prior* to the CRE Meeting maximised their input into the working group. The Pre-Meeting Stage proved to be an excellent group process that both developed ownership and maximised learning.
- Participants made frequent reference to the exceptional nature of the working group both in terms of the diversity of evaluation experience and the intellectual rigour that participants brought to the discussion table. The exceptional nature of the working group can be attributed to the careful selection and identification of participants by INCORE.
- Many participants stated that the CRE Meeting had not only furthered their thinking about evaluation, but that it would change their practice of and/or approach towards evaluation in the future. In general, participants expressed the hope that more workshops like that of the CRE Meeting would be held in order to continue the debate with policy makers, practitioners and funders.

### **D) The Pre-Meeting Stage**

The Pre-Meeting Stage of the CRE Meeting was an interactive process designed to maximise the input of participants and tailor the working group. It consisted of three stages:

Stage 1: Identifying participant objectives, areas of experience and suggested topics for discussion to generate the agenda for the working group meeting.

Stage 2: Asking participants to submit brief comments on a specific subject/area of specialisation.

Stage 3: Circulating a draft copy of INCORE's research report to all participants for comments and suggestions.

The Pre-Meeting Stage proved to be an excellent group process that both developed ownership and maximised learning. Fourteen of the seventeen participants made special reference to this in Participant Feedback a few of their comments are listed below:

*“I think it’s a good idea to get the mind working around these issues ahead of time.”*

*“every e-mail, every question, every communication with INCORE previous to the meeting, made me feel inside the objectives and methodology designed for the two days”*

*“it helped me to begin to formalise what I actually thought about CR evaluation processes and to take the work in hand seriously”*

## **II) What Participants found most useful about the CRE Meeting**

### **Diversity & Quality of Participants**

Participants in the CRE Meeting were carefully selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- Firstly, according to expertise in CR evaluation
- Secondly, according to the need to ensure balanced representation of all stakeholders within the working group, that is, thinkers, evaluators, practitioners and funders.
- Thirdly, according to the need to ensure the diverse make-up of the group in terms of nationality, country experience and gender.

That the working group convened by INCORE was exceptional in its make-up was especially evident in Participant Feedback. Two-thirds of the participants asked, ‘overall, what did you find most useful about the CRE Meeting?’ directly referred to the diversity and quality of participants in the meeting:

*“it was wonderful to meet such a powerful group of people. I have every intention of keeping in touch with some of them and utilising their experiences to enrich our own approach to evaluation.”*

*“an extraordinary group of people”*      *“wonderful selection of people...very informative”*

*“It provided a forum for people from a range of evaluation experiences to share knowledge and inform each other of their work”*

Furthermore, many participants attributed the quality of conversations and discussions held during the CRE Meeting, to the diverse experiences and intellectual rigour participants brought to the workshop:

*“I found just listening to the variety of conversations around all the issues raised was very informing and thought provoking.”*

*“by this measure (quality of conversation), the meeting was an unqualified success.”*

### **Structure**

The structure of the CRE Meeting was the product of Pre-Meeting Stage input by participants. Having identified participant objectives, areas of experience and their suggested topics for discussion, an agenda was generated for the working-group meeting.

The agenda consisted of a variety of sessions, each of which fell within one of the following themes:

- Impact
- Conducting CR Evaluations
- Utilisation of Evaluation.

Participants were invited to attend the session of their choosing and were under no obligation to attend all the sessions belonging to one particular theme. Whilst each session was assigned a suggested topic for discussion, the format and content of discussions was left entirely to the group's discretion. During the two days a number of sessions were also left open. Participants were invited to fill these as they wished e.g. by initiating mini working groups on topics not on the agenda, by continuing discussions from earlier sessions halted by time constraints etc. As a result, the structure of the CRE Meeting was both inclusive and flexible. A large number of participants commented on how valuable this structure proved during the workshop.

*“the inclusive approach...I feel, really worked...This participatory approach not only managed to address many of the issues that the participants wanted to have answered but also made them/me responsible for the outcome...very vibrant”*

### III) How could the CRE Meeting have been improved?

#### Case Studies

During Participant Feedback, participants were asked, ‘how would you improve the CRE Meeting?’ The vast majority of participants suggested that a greater use of cr evaluation case studies would have helped deepen and clarify discussions:

*“Case material...would have provided focus...e.g. one or two actual CR/PB evaluations, with these being walked through, analysed, deconstructed.”*

*“(there needs to be) more opportunity for working on specific case studies that address the issue at hand”*

#### Terminology

A number of participants felt that a definition of the terms relevant to session topics, perhaps at the beginning of sessions, would have aided discussion. These participants also noted that clarity of terminology is a challenge that needs to be met by the field as a whole, before further discussion about cr evaluation can be entered into:

*“especially in our field which is continually evolving, there is always definitional imprecision”*

*“a little more work done in defining terms such as transfer etc. (would) allow a sense of the various interpretations of terms to be shared from the beginning, cutting down on unnecessary confusion”*

#### Greater Diversity

Despite the diverse backgrounds of participants selected for the working group, a number of participants felt this could have been widened e.g. to include more people working in war-torn countries.

*“it is important to extend the invitation to meetings such as INCORE’s to everyone, especially funders”*

#### ***How could the CRE Meeting have been improved?***



#### **IV) How should the debate be continued with policy makers, practitioners and funders?**

During a brainstorming session participants were asked, ‘how do we continue the debate with policy makers, practitioners and funders?’ The vast majority of participants expressed a desire for the organisation of more workshops like that of the CRE Meeting:

*“we could continue the debate by finding a completed evaluation, bringing in all the actors and deconstructing the process.”*

*“(it) would be good to take the conclusions (of the meeting) further and develop them”*

*“(we need) one or two more days. Ideas are just now sinking in...but we have to leave”*

*“great work by INCORE and this is an idea that needs to be an ongoing discussion”*

#### **V) Participant Learning**

During Participant Feedback, a number of participants commented on what they had learnt from the CRE Meeting and how this might change their future practice of/approach towards CR evaluation:

*“(The CRE Meeting) crystallised a lot of reasons for me to be really humble in what we claim we can ‘see’ when we engage in evaluative processes, and to be really careful about the political impact evaluations can have on those we insist should be evaluated.”*

*“The working group progressed my thinking on conflict resolution because it pushed the realities and limits of what can and can’t be known from assessment”*

*"I now realize that my experiences are not unique and are actually quite common...I now ask myself why is no-one doing anything about it?"*

*"for me the framework opened up new ways of looking at evaluation and new approaches that I would not have thought about"*

## **VI) Organisation of the CRE Meeting**

Participant Feedback paid compliment to the organisation of the CRE Meeting:

*"Superb!" "great logistical organisation" "very well-organised and very caring"*

*"the INCORE staff went a long way to establishing an environment of reflection and learning"*

*"Space provided for critical reflection"*

*"(The CRE Meeting was) challenging and exiting...INCORE is managing to move this crucial discussion forward and that is tremendously refreshing"*