



Man walking towards his village carrying a rifle and a baby on his shoulders (Pibor, South Sudan). SVEN TORFINN/PANOS

# EU EXTERNAL ACTION: TOWARDS CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

**The European Union has a responsibility to mainstream conflict sensitivity into all aspects of its external action – particularly development co-operation – if it is to be seen as a global actor aiming to ‘preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security’ (Lisbon Treaty; Art. 21.2). This briefing sets out some of the practical steps EU actors can take to ensure their interventions and good intentions support peace-building, rather than inadvertently fuelling conflict.**

## WHAT IS CONFLICT SENSITIVITY?

There is a two-way relationship between aid and conflict. Not only are aid programmes adversely affected by conflicts, but aid inevitably also affects the political economy of those countries receiving it – potentially changing the dynamics of any conflict. Ideally the effect will be positive: aid will contribute to building peace as well as to development. However, in some cases, aid interventions may actually *increase* the risk of violent conflict, for instance by reinforcing the patterns of economic or political exclusion that gave rise to grievances, tensions and violence in the first place.

During the 1990s, new tools were developed to help aid actors understand and avoid the potentially adverse effects of their interventions in conflict situations, such as the ‘Do No Harm’ approach and ‘Peace and Conflict Impact Assessments’.

These approaches were further developed in the early 2000s, and are often brought together under the concept of ‘conflict sensitivity’.

Being conflict-sensitive starts with the recognition that all aid interventions inject new resources into a context, potentially creating losers as well as winners. Saferworld’s research into the impact of a water aid project in Kyrgyzstan vividly illustrates this point:

*“When we had no water, we had no conflicts. When we got water, that’s when the conflicts started!”*

*“Tajiks don’t like to see internationals here in our village, because they think that we’ll get something and they won’t.”*



# CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT: MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

**“The European Union, through this programme, underlines its political commitment to pursue conflict prevention as one of the main objectives of the EU’s external relations.”**

**EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts, 2001**



It is essential to understand local conflict dynamics, especially the relations between stakeholders and the issues that create tensions and problems. It is then important to analyse how one particular intervention will impact on those dynamics. For example, this might mean asking ‘who stands to win and who to lose?’, and ‘will this reinforce or redress existing inequalities?’ Lastly, being conflict-sensitive is not just about understanding, but about *acting upon* this understanding. That means building in the appropriate provisions and activities when interventions are first being planned – or adjusting on-going interventions – to ensure that they do not exacerbate but help to reduce conflict tensions, by reducing inequalities and bridging divisions.

**A CONFLICT-SENSITIVE APPROACH**

- 1 Understand the context** in which you operate, especially the conflict drivers and dynamics
- 2 Understand the nature of your intervention.** This means not just what you do (your programming) but also how you operate, where, when and who you work with (your whole engagement in the context)
- 3 Analyse the interaction between your intervention and the context,** to identify conflict risks and peacebuilding opportunities
- 4 Act upon this analysis** so you can avoid negative impacts and maximise positive ones.

Over the last decade, many actors have recognised the linkages between peace, development and security, and the need to address the individual elements in ways that are mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory. The 2011 *World Development Report (WDR)* identified some of the key challenges to equitable and sustainable development: state fragility, conflict and its links with organised crime, poor governance and authoritarian regimes. In order to respond to the specific challenges of conflict and fragility, a group of decision makers and civil society representatives from international organisations, donor countries and fragile states agreed the ‘New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States’. This sets out a framework to guide different stakeholders’ interventions and partnerships, and to mitigate the risks that arise from providing aid in contexts affected by conflict and fragility.

The EU has endorsed the New Deal, along with other key documents such as the Organisation for Economic

Cooperation and Development’s ‘Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations’. The EU has also sought to address these challenges by formulating its own policies. The *EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts (2001)*, the *Council Conclusions on Security and Development (2007)*, the *Council Conclusions on an EU response to Situations of Fragility (2007)*, the *Council Conclusions on Conflict Prevention (2011)* and the *Agenda for Change (2011)* are some of the main policy documents setting out the EU’s commitment to become more effective at preventing conflicts, and supporting peacebuilding and state-building. As stated in these documents, one way to prevent conflict and build peace is to apply conflict-sensitive approaches to the various instruments and decisions of EU External Action, including development co-operation.

Undertaking a ‘conflict analysis’ is key to developing a conflict-sensitive approach (see section: *What is a conflict analysis?*).



Herder leading his goats, Kenya. KAREN ROBINSON/PANOS

**CASE STUDY STRENGTHENING LIVELIHOODS PROJECT IN NORTHERN KENYA**

In Northern Kenya, an area with deep divisions between different tribal groups, a livelihoods project implemented by the Diocese of Maralal had planned to provide goats to community members so they could benefit from their milk and meat. It was agreed that the offspring of the goats would be dispersed to other families, multiplying the project’s benefits. After a conflict analysis this activity was adjusted to ensure that the goats would be distributed equally among three communities: Pokot, Turkana and Samburu. The project gave goats to five families in each community. They then passed on the offspring to people in the other

communities. This used a traditional covenant – ‘once I give you a goat, we are brothers’ – to build peace. The activity was strengthened by the creation of a shared market that not only increased acceptance and participation in the overall livelihoods project but also brought communities closer together. Where previously there was no communication between the different groups, they now buy and sell milk and meat through their shared market. Community cohesion has improved as a result.

Source: Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, *Promoting conflict sensitivity amongst donor agencies: policy brief.*

# WHY IS CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IMPORTANT?

There are four main reasons why conflict sensitivity adds value to the EU's external action:

- **Conflict sensitivity makes engagement in fragile and conflict-affected states more effective:** Conflict and insecurity pose a great threat to development. Conflict sensitivity is therefore a way of ensuring that interventions are designed to address critical obstacles to development. By taking a conflict-sensitive approach, aid becomes more context-specific and sustainable: interventions are grounded in a solid understanding of needs, risks to anticipate and opportunities to seize.
- **Conflict sensitivity is more cost effective:** Prevention is better value for money than cure. According to the 2011 WDR, a civil war costs a developing country up to 30 years of economic growth. By anticipating risks and by addressing conflict causes, external aid and assistance can be used in a more efficient way than by injecting large amounts of resources once a crisis has already erupted.
- **Conflict sensitivity strengthens development good practice:** For decades, good development planners and practitioners have been effectively using a conflict-sensitive approach in their work, without necessarily identifying it as such. The methodology of conflict-sensitive approaches helps to make this process more systematic – minimising conflict risks and maximising opportunities to contribute to peace.
- **Conflict sensitivity is a framework to manage security risks:** Being more sensitive to risks acts as a reality check for the planning and implementation of all the operational aspects of an intervention. It helps organisations to manage dangers to staff, programmes, property and reputation proactively – for example, helping them take difficult decisions such as when to deploy, suspend or withdraw programmes as a conflict evolves.

Ultimately, fully integrating conflict sensitivity into all development programming will help create a virtuous circle, with development being less seriously undermined by violent conflict while at the same time having the most positive impact on the causes of violence.



Girls at a waterhole – Moroto, Uganda. KATIE HARRIS

## CASE STUDY WATER MANAGEMENT IN WESTERN UGANDA

Water is a highly contested resource in the Kasese district of Western Uganda. This is especially the case in mountain areas where water can cause conflicts between up- and downstream communities such as Mahango and Rukoki. Here, women from both communities have to get up early in the morning to walk the 5 km to the nearest water points where they must wait for hours in long queues before filling their jerry cans and beginning the journey home.

In 2006, after years of campaigning on the issue by local communities, the local government approved funds to build new infrastructure which would make water more accessible. However, the designs meant that water taps would be placed in Rukoki only, inevitably generating anger and resent-

ment in Mahango and leading to tensions between the two communities.

Saferworld, with local partners REDROC and CECORE, organised consultation meetings between the two communities and the district water officers. Issues relating to land ownership and the location of the taps, responsibility for maintenance of the water pipes and who would get to provide labour for the construction were all discussed.

People from both communities were enthusiastic about the dialogue as it helped reconcile the two communities and enabled them to better understand their water-related conflict. The process also helped the district water office to revise its proposals and improve the way in which it undertakes project consultations with communities.

A conflict-sensitive approach should not only apply to contexts that are overtly affected by conflict and fragility. It should also be considered as a way to prevent countries from slipping into fragility and conflict in the first place.

**“No low-income fragile or conflict-affected country has yet achieved a single MDG.”**

World Development Report, 2011

# CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IN EU EXTERNAL ACTION

Through the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has the ambition to become a stronger global actor, to build peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security. This in turn means that the EU has a responsibility to implement conflict sensitivity throughout its external actions and in the interventions of its partners, and more particularly in all aspects of EU development co-operation, as a central and powerful tool of EU external action. EU institutions are currently preparing for the next multi-annual programming cycle – this is an opportunity to integrate conflict sensitivity into the design and implementation of development strategies, programmes and projects.

■ **Regional and country strategies:** the elaboration of strategies should start by undertaking conflict analyses which will enable EU actors to identify the drivers of conflict and the opportunities for peace and stability in a given context. This analysis can also inform the process of defining the priority sectors for development co-operation by focusing on the areas which have the potential to bring about positive change. For example, in Bolivia, the 2007–13 Country Strategy Paper sought to put a specific emphasis on conflict prevention by tackling some of the areas which had a direct impact on conflict: lack of economic opportunities, drug production and trafficking, and management of water resources.

■ **Budget support:** in contexts characterised by poor governance, human rights abuses, illegitimate and/or ineffective leadership, or where resources are used to the benefit of particular favoured groups, direct and sector-based budget support may inadvertently fuel conflict by deepening and prolonging divisions and inequalities. It can also legitimise governments that are actively involved in violence or marginalisation against sections of their own populations. The EU's assessment tools and eligibility conditions to grant budget support should include some form of conflict analysis, as well as a comprehensive assessment of alternative ways of channelling aid to ensure the EU consistently and pro-actively supports improvements in state-society relations.

■ **Sector-based and project-based support:** conflict sensitivity can be applied throughout the different phases of

the project cycle management. At the identification and formulation phases it is crucial to assess how a programme or a specific project relates to the conflict dynamics of a particular context, and then build in provisions for these interventions to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on those dynamics. Monitoring and evaluation should review not just the intervention's outputs and outcomes, but also the relationship between this intervention and the conflict context.

■ **Public diplomacy:** addressing conflict and other sensitive issues in a given context can also be reinforced through public diplomacy – communicating the EU's views and approaches beyond political channels using public statements, press releases, articles in local media, and other outreach initiatives. Taking advantage of their enhanced political mandate, EU Delegations have an opportunity to demonstrate the EU's commitment and coherent

approach to preventing conflict, building peace and supporting positive change – in words and in deeds. Saferworld's research in Kenya and Sri Lanka has shown the importance of EU Delegations' public diplomacy initiatives in provoking change in local government attitudes and actions, and supporting fundamental values at the core of EU external action.

**“Security/conflict sensitive assessments and conflict analysis [should be carried out] in the preparation of country and regional strategies and programmes.”**

**Council Conclusions on Security and Development, 2007**



Women taking part in a micro-credit meeting in Sri Lanka. SVEN TORFINN/PANOS

## CASE STUDY EU CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IN SRI LANKA

Two years after the end of the conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, security has improved but deep social divisions remain. While most of the families displaced by fighting have now returned home, allocation of resources such as housing, health and education is a highly sensitive issue which has the potential to increase tensions between different groups. As one of the most significant donors in Sri Lanka, the way that the EU distributes aid potentially has a big impact on conflict dynamics. In 2009–10, Saferworld assessed 16 EU-funded

projects in Sri Lanka, identifying best practice as well as areas in need of improvement before providing practical recommendations for follow-up actions. Despite the challenging context, many of the projects assessed demonstrated positive examples of conflict sensitivity such as targeting the causes of conflict, counteracting discrimination and responding flexibly to crisis. This work helped to ensure that conflict sensitivity was carefully considered during the mid-term review of the EU's 2007–13 country strategy for Sri Lanka.

# WHAT IS A CONFLICT ANALYSIS?

Conflict analysis is the systematic study of the profile, causes, actors and dynamics of conflict. It provides organisations with the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘why’ and ‘when’ of a conflict, by looking at the key drivers of conflicts and the links between them, the different levels of conflicts (local, national, regional, international), as well as what divides and what connects people. As a result, a conflict analysis should also seek to identify the opportunities to build or consolidate peace.

Conflicts are very fluid and changeable, but a regularly updated conflict analysis can help develop a better understanding of the context in which organisations work, in turn informing internal processes such as planning, programming and political dialogue.

A conflict analysis should be designed to meet the needs of programme designers and policy makers in the context in question, but typically consists of the following elements:

## PROFILE

A conflict profile provides a brief characterisation of the context of a conflict, looking at political, economic and socio-cultural aspects, issues that emerge from these, and the history of the conflict.

## CAUSES

Causes of conflict may be:

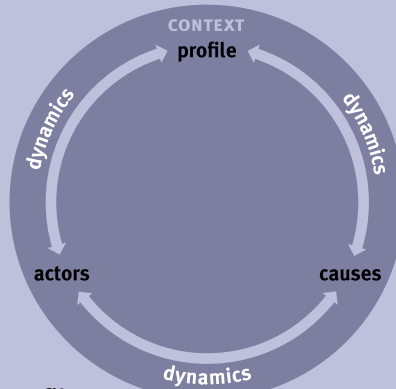
- **structural** – pervasive factors built into the fabric of a society (for instance, if there is unequal access to natural resources or a discriminatory system in place like ‘apartheid’ in South Africa)
- **proximate** – factors which contribute towards a climate of violence (for instance, a proliferation of illicit small arms or abusive security forces)
- **triggers** – single events that may set off or escalate violence (for example, elections, coups, or sudden currency collapses).

There will never be one single cause of a conflict and protracted conflicts often generate new causes as they continue.

## ACTORS

Thinking about people is central to conflict analysis. ‘Actors’ refers to all those individuals, groups and institutions that contribute to or are affected by a conflict, at different levels (local, national, regional, international), their respective interests, goals and positions, capacities to achieve their ambitions as well as the interactions

## KEY QUESTIONS FOR A CONFLICT ANALYSIS



### Profile

- What is the political, economic, and socio-cultural context?
- What are emergent political, economic and social issues?
- What conflict prone/affected areas can be situated within the context?
- Is there a history of conflict?

### Causes

- What are the structural causes of conflict?
- What issues can be considered as proximate causes of conflict?

- What triggers could contribute to the outbreak/ further escalation of conflict?
- What new factors contribute to prolonging conflict dynamics?
- What factors can contribute to peace?

### Actors

- Who are the main actors?
- What are their interests, goals, positions, capacities and relationships?
- What capacities for peace can be identified?
- What actors can be identified as spoilers? Why? Are they inadvertent or intentional spoilers?

### Dynamics

- What are current conflict trends?
- What are windows of opportunity?
- What scenarios can be developed from the analysis of the conflict profile, causes and actors?

Diagram source: *Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: A resource pack.*

between them. A conflict analysis should also pay attention to the capacities for peace, i.e. the institutions, organisations, mechanisms and procedures in a society having a role or a potential to deal with and/or to manage conflicts and differences of interest in a peaceful way.

## DYNAMICS

The interaction between a conflict’s profile, its causes and actors can be described as that conflict’s dynamics – how the conflict changes and develops over time. Understanding a conflict’s dynamics will help identify what can connect people across the conflict divides and ‘windows of opportunity’ for peacebuilding and statebuilding. This can help organisations to plan their engagement. It also provides an opportunity to anticipate future scenarios and set out contingency plans for dealing with an uncertain future.

## PARTICIPATORY CONFLICT ANALYSIS

When undertaking conflict analyses, it is crucial to also seek and integrate the views and concerns of the people who are affected by conflict and fragility to ensure the analysis is as comprehensive

as possible and also reflects their visions of peace and statebuilding.

## BUILDING LESSONS INTO CONFLICT ANALYSIS

Ideally, conflict analysis also incorporates an element of reflection on past peacebuilding and development efforts, in order to inform innovative strategies that anticipate and overcome the problems of the past.

## WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN MANAGING AND CONDUCTING A CONFLICT ANALYSIS?

A key lesson learned from Saferworld’s work on conflict analysis with the EU is that those who need to act on the analysis are more likely to do so if they have been engaged early in the process. This does not necessarily mean that officials need to do everything themselves. Much of the research and initial analysis can be done by outsiders – such as research institutions, think tanks and national and international NGOs – but officials do need to have some form of ‘ownership’, or investment, in the process, to ensure that it meets their needs.

# RESOURCES



- Conflict sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: A resource pack**

The seminal manual on CSA was published in 2004 by a consortium of peacebuilding NGOs, including Saferworld. The resource pack is available at: [www.saferworld.org.uk/smartweb/resources/view-resource/148](http://www.saferworld.org.uk/smartweb/resources/view-resource/148)



- How to guide to conflict sensitivity: From concept to impact**

In 2012 a wider consortium of 35 humanitarian, development and peacebuilding agencies including Saferworld published the *How to guide to conflict sensitivity: from concept to impact*. The guide is available at: [www.saferworld.org.uk/smartweb/resources/view-resource/646](http://www.saferworld.org.uk/smartweb/resources/view-resource/646)
- Guidance on evaluating conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities (OECD DAC)**

This manual sets out tools for assessing the impact of conflict-related interventions. It may also be useful in assessing the conflict sensitivity of wider development interventions.



- Reflecting on peace practice: Participant training manual**

This manual (in particular the sections 'Findings on conflict analysis' and 'Elements of Good Conflict Analysis') offers important guidance on how to go about conflict analysis and link this to stronger peacebuilding impacts. The manual is available at: [www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/manual/rpp\\_training\\_participant\\_manual\\_rev\\_20090104\\_Pdf.pdf](http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/manual/rpp_training_participant_manual_rev_20090104_Pdf.pdf)



- Conflict-sensitive assessment of EU programmes in Sri Lanka: Best practices and recommendations**

This assessment commissioned by the EC provides some useful lessons on the successes, challenges and opportunities of mainstreaming conflict sensitivity within EC programmes in a specific context like Sri Lanka. [www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/Conflict-Sensitivity%20Assessment%20Sri%20Lanka.pdf](http://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/Conflict-Sensitivity%20Assessment%20Sri%20Lanka.pdf)



**The Initiative for Peacebuilding – Early Warning Analysis to Action (IfP-EW)** is a consortium led by International Alert and funded by the European Commission. It draws on the expertise of 10 members with offices across the EU and in conflict-affected countries. It aims to develop and harness international knowledge and expertise in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding to ensure that all stakeholders, including EU institutions, can access strong, independent, locally derived analysis in order to facilitate better informed and more evidence-based policy and programming decisions. To learn more, visit: [www.ifp-ew.eu](http://www.ifp-ew.eu)



**Working to prevent violent conflict**

**Saferworld** is an independent non-governmental organisation working to prevent violent conflict and encourage co-operative approaches to security. For over 20 years we have been working towards international conflict prevention by contributing to the development of a range of policies and programmes in the areas of small arms control, security and access to justice, conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding. We work with local communities, civil society, governments and international organisations to encourage and support effective policies and practices through advocacy, research and policy development and through supporting the actions of local actors. To learn more, visit: [www.saferworld.org.uk](http://www.saferworld.org.uk)



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