

#### **I. Working around, in and on conflict.**

A useful distinction has been made between working ‘around’, ‘in’ and on’ conflict:

- Working around conflict (donors and agencies avoid the issue of conflict or treat it as a negative externality);
- Working in conflict (donors and agencies recognise the need to be more sensitive to conflict dynamics and adapt policies and programmes accordingly, these are expected to be ‘conflict sensitive’);
- Working on conflict (donors and agencies have a more explicit focus on conflict management and resolution and deliberately seek to engage with drivers of conflict).

Working around and in conflict is not by itself enough for an effort to classify as ‘peacebuilding’.

#### **II. Do No Harm.**

A minimum obligation for any action or intervention in and on conflict is that it does no harm i.e. it consciously looks for and seeks to avoid or mitigate negative impacts. Examples of negative impacts, even of peacebuilding interventions, would be

- Worsening divisions between conflicting groups
- Increasing danger for participants in peace activities
- Reinforcing structural or overt violence
- Diverting human and material resources from productive peace activities
- Increasing cynicism (dialogue projects!!)
- Disempowering local people. (Anderson and Olson 2003:22-28)

#### **III. Conflict Sensitivity.**

Conflict sensitive actions and programming seek to consciously avoid or minimize negative impacts (‘do no harm’) and equally consciously tries to create positive impacts on the conflict dynamics. Conflict-sensitivity has started to be promoted out of concerns of the inadvertent negative effects of interventions, projects, efforts that remained ‘conflict blind’.

### What is 'Conflict Sensitivity'?

The Resource Pack (2004) defines conflict sensitivity as the capacity of an organisation to:

- Understand the (conflict) context in which it operates;
- Understand the interaction between its operations and the (conflict) context; and
- Act upon the understanding of this interaction in order to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on the (conflict) context.

Work cannot be done with 'conflict sensitivity' without solid conflict analysis. *"The foundation of conflict-sensitive practice is a thorough and regularly updated conflict analysis; it is the base rock to which all project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation should be linked."* (Barbolet et alii 2005:9)

Genuine attempts to work conflict-sensitively also draw attention beyond the approach of one's own agency to that of others in the same operating environment.

*"...understanding a context from a conflict-sensitive perspective helps agencies to understand that their own positive contributions to mitigating violence can easily be frustrated by carelessness from a conflict blind or conflict-insensitive organisation operating in the same area. This realisation encourages organisations that wish to be conflict-sensitive to strategically engage with organisations they might otherwise choose not to engage with.(...) In terms of engaging with stakeholders, conflict sensitivity is quite clear about the need to work beyond one's own organisation, and even beyond partner organisations (Resource Pack, Chapter 4, 5). It is therefore important that conflict sensitivity apply to – and be understood by – a wide range of stakeholders. For reasons of practicality and efficiency, the application of conflict sensitivity often leads organisations to work with other like-minded organisations and to advocate for change amongst those most amenable to change. To ensure that conflict-sensitive development, peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance projects do in fact contribute to the consolidation of peace, more work is required to effect change amongst agencies that are either uninterested or antagonistic to engaging constructively in conflict transformation."* (Barbolet et alii 2005:11/12)

#### **IV. Conflict Sensitivity is not Peacebuilding.**

There are however two fairly persistent problems with 'conflict sensitivity' and 'peacebuilding'.

- a) The assumption that 'conflict sensitivity' and 'peacebuilding' will, as such, have positive peace impacts.

These assumptions have been challenged: there is no guarantee that 'conflict sensitive' interventions and efforts will be addressing key drivers of conflict. Doing no harm may be necessary but will not be sufficient. It would also be mistaken to believe that 'peacebuilding' work will automatically be 'conflict

sensitive’- this too is not guaranteed as it can also be implemented insensitively and have negative impacts.

*“Just because an activity is labeled as peacebuilding does not automatically mean that it has a positive impact on conflict. Much of the focus in the development of thinking and practice has been aimed at the potential conflict insensitivity of humanitarian and development action. However, activities that promote dialogue, peace education, or reconciliation can also have negative impacts on conflict dynamics. (...) Likewise, just because an activity is designed to promote conflict sensitivity, does not mean that it is automatically conflict-sensitive in itself.” (Barbolet et alii 2005:8)*

b) The belief that ‘conflict sensitivity’ and ‘peacebuilding’ are interchangeable concepts.

Sometimes the word ‘conflict sensitivity’ is deliberately used because it may not carry as many political connotations as ‘conflict transformation’ or ‘peacebuilding’ does. But often both concepts are used interchangeably, as if they were synonyms.

This conflation of the two concepts has been criticized by Woodrow and Chigas.

*“ALL programs in ALL contexts, regardless of sector, program type, conflict phase or constituency, should be conflict-sensitive. That is, they must take account of the potential for violent conflict, and adopt measures to minimize the negative effects and maximize the positive effects of program efforts.*

*Peacebuilding is a type of programming with particular aims. It includes a wide range of programming modes with a common aim: they all aim explicitly to address the key drivers of conflict and, ultimately, change the conflict dynamics, with particular emphasis on reducing or preventing violence as a means of addressing political, social and economic problems and injustices.” (Woodrow and Chigas no date p. 11)*

<b>COMPARISON OF CONFLICT SENSITIVITY AND PEACEBUILDING</b>	
<b>Conflict Sensitivity</b>	<b>Peacebuilding</b>
<p><b>Definition:</b> Conflict sensitivity refers to the ability of an organization to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Understand the context in which it is operating, particularly intergroup relations;</li> <li>☐ Understand the interactions between its interventions and the context/group relations; and</li> <li>☐ Act upon the understanding of these</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Peacebuilding refers to measures designed to consolidate peaceful relations and strengthen viable political, socio-economic, and cultural institutions capable of handling conflict, and to strengthen other mechanisms that will either create or support the necessary conditions for sustained peace.</p>

interactions, in order to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts.	
<b>Main aim:</b> Work <b>IN</b> the context of conflict to minimize negative and maximize positive impacts of programming (on conflict, but also on other factors).	<b>Main aim:</b> Work <b>ON</b> conflict, seeking to reduce key drivers of violent conflict and to contribute to Peace Writ Large (the broader societal-level peace).
<p><b>Applied to Whom/What Programming:</b> All programmes, of all types, in all sectors, at all stages of conflict (latent, hot, post-war) must be conflict sensitive, including peacebuilding efforts themselves.</p> <p><b>Required Analysis:</b> Requires an adequate understanding of the conflict (e.g., dividers and connectors analysis) to avoid worsening dividers or weakening connectors; to reduce dividers and support existing connectors.</p> <p><b>Standard/Measure of Effectiveness:</b> At a minimum, the program/project does not make the conflict worse—and usually also makes a positive contribution.</p> <p>Taken from Woodrow and Chigas n.d. p. 10</p>	<p><b>Applied to Whom/What Programming:</b> Peacebuilding programmes are those that articulate goals or objectives aimed at securing peace. Such goals/objectives can be integrated into other programming modes (development, relief) and sectors—or peacebuilding can be a stand alone effort.</p> <p><b>Required Analysis:</b> Requires a deeper understanding of the key drivers of conflict and dynamics among factors and key actors, in order to ensure program relevance.</p> <p><b>Standard/Measure of Effectiveness:</b> Programme/project reduces the power of key driving factors of conflict, contributing to Peace Writ Large.</p>

**Relevant reading:**

Barbolet, A., R. Goldwyn, H. Groenewald and A. Sherriff 2005: The Utility and Dilemmas of Conflict Sensitivity. Berlin, Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management

Resource Pack 2004: Conflict Sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Peacebuilding. Nairobi, Africa Peace Forum, Various agencies collaborating

Woodrow, P. & D. Chigas n.d. A Distinction with a Difference: conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding. Boston, CDA Inc, RPP