Fact Sheet Conflict Sensitivity

1. Definitions and what is Conflict Sensitivity all about

Conflict Sensitivity is the ability of an organization to:

a) understand the context in which it is operating in, in particular to understand intergroup tensions and the “divisive” issues with a potential for conflict, and the “connecting” issues with the potential to mitigate conflict and strengthen social cohesion.

b) understand the interaction between its intervention and that context, and

c) act upon that understanding, in order to avoid unintentionally feeding into further division, and to maximize the potential contribution to strengthen social cohesion and peace.¹

Why is conflict sensitivity important?

For many years aid practitioners have been pointing to the fact that humanitarian, development, or peacebuilding interventions sometimes have negative unintended side effects. Infusing resources (in terms of projects/programs) in environments of inequality, scarcity, conflict, polarisation and intergroup tensions, can - and often does - exacerbate existing tensions and conflicts. On the other hand, the “positive” potential of aid to strengthen social cohesion (through participatory development etc.) and transforming conflicts is equally clear. What therefore is needed is an institutional recognition and awareness of these facts, and an approach that minimizes the risks and maximises the positive potential of working in conflict affected situations. This particular approach is called Conflict Sensitive Program Management (CSPM). It can be described as a lens to look at reality, a norm, a management instrument, a project/program management tool as well as a matter of personal attitude and behaviour.

The definition of Conflict Sensitive Program Management (CSPM) is relatively simple and straightforward: CSPM means that a “conflict lens” is built into all of the institution’s considerations. Be it on strategic, operational, organisational, or personal level.

2. Central focus for effective work: tailor interactions to avoid negative side-effects & maximize positive contributions to social cohesion

CSPM acknowledges that in ALL contexts there exist cleavages that divide people (sometimes called “dividers”, “sources of tension” or fault-lines etc) and issues that connect and unify (“connectors”, local capacities for peace etc.). These factors are different in every context, and must be thoroughly analysed (see below: the three steps).

¹ Adapted from International Alert et al., 2004. Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: a resource Pack. London: International Alert. Available for download at: www.conflictsensitivity.org
2.1 What is a “Divider” / “Connector”?

Situations of conflict are characterized by two “realities”: Dividers and Connectors. There are elements in societies which divide people from each other and serve as sources of tension. There are also always elements which connect people and can serve as local capacities for peace.

Key Questions
The following questions can be used to unlock dividers and connectors in a variety of ways.

- What are the dividing factors in this situation? What are the connecting factors?
- What are the current threats to peace and stability? What are the current supports?
- What are the most dangerous factors in this situation? How dangerous is this Divider?
- What can cause tension to rise in this situation?
- What brings people together in this situation?
- Where do people meet? What do people do together?
- Does this Connector have potential?

Key Issues in using Dividers and Connectors

- Dividers and Connectors exist in all contexts, even those that are not explicitly in conflict.
- It is important to be very specific. In the conflict situation, what are people doing? Ex: do not use: “women”; “religion”; “Hamas” etc.
- Dividers and Connectors are not people.
- Dividers and Connectors are dynamic.
- Teams do analysis work better than individuals.

Second, CSPM acknowledges that by operating in such contexts through humanitarian, development, peacebuilding or security interventions we become part and parcel of this context, and as a consequence we become also part of its conflict configuration. CSPM ensures that these interactions are understood and adapted accordingly to avoid unintentionally feeding into further division, and to maximize the potential contribution to strengthen social cohesion and peace.

The term “interaction” is a central one in CSPM. It is mainly through two patterns that we interact with the context:

1) our actions, resources and resource transfers
2) our behaviours and messages

2.2 Patterns of interaction: actions and behaviour = consequences

Actions, Resources, and Resource Transfers
When an organization enters a context, it brings certain ‘resources’. We bring materials, personnel, and intellectual capital. The ways we transfer this stuff to the communities we work with has effects. It is not just the resources themselves, but our and our organizations’ actions in transferring or distributing them.

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3 This chapter is an adapted excerpt of a factsheet by CDA’s Do No Harm Project „The ABCs of assistance: actions, behaviors and their consequences“ http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/issue/dnh_abcs_of_assistance_Pdf.pdf
Simply put, these are our Actions, and their Consequences. There are five ways our actions have an effect on conflict. None of these has to do with precisely what we bring into a context, but rather how we go about storing, maintaining and distributing those goods.

1. Theft/Diversion: Fueling the conflict with stolen or diverted goods.
3. Distribution Effects: Distributing goods along the lines of the conflict.
4. Substitution Effects: Replacing existing functioning systems or structures.
5. Legitimization Effects: Giving legitimacy to a group or leader by working with them.

It is important to remember to be aware of the impacts of these effects, and monitor for them consciously and thoughtfully.

Behaviors, Messages, and Implicit Ethical Messages
Aid workers send messages to communities through their behavior, as much as through their words, and their behavior, positive or negative, has consequences for individuals and for organizations. In fact, often, an outsider’s behavior is a more trusted barometer for their intentions than what they say.

We can distinguish four broad categories which clarify the types of behavior that have an impact, either negative or positive: the RAFT.

1. Respect
2. Accountability
3. Fairness
4. Transparency

Staff behavior can send negative messages about an organization’s or an individual’s intentions. The patterns of behavior fall into four categories: patterns that convey Respect or Disrespect; patterns that convey Accountability or an unwillingness to be held accountable; patterns of Fairness or unfairness. These categories are useful in identifying how a negative pattern of behavior is having an impact on an organization’s program.

Positive patterns can build trust among the communities an organization serves and its presence and work will be more accepted by local people. Positive behaviors lead to calmer communities and substantive interaction and it lays the groundwork for true partnership and development.

Negative patterns can undermine an organization’s efforts and put their staff in danger. Negative behaviors lead to relationships that are antagonistic and untrusting, and can make communities feel humiliated. In extreme cases, violating these principles can lead to violence against an organization or within the community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Patterns of Behavior</th>
<th>Positive Patterns of Behavior</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Belligerence/Anger</td>
<td>Calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suspicion</td>
<td>Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td>Sensitivity to Local Concerns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impunity</td>
<td>Responsibility/Accountability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arms and Power</td>
<td>Rule of Law/Nonviolence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Different value for different lives</td>
<td>Recognition of value for all lives</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Transparency cuts across all these patterns of behavior. Being clear and open about your project and its aims, inviting local people to participate in the process, give their feedback and share their concerns reinforces positive patterns of behavior. Closing a project to critique or criticism from outsiders leads to perceptions that an organization does not respect or trust local people, and is not willing to be held accountable for their actions.
3. A three step approach in practice (CSPM process)

With the following instrument conflict sensitivity can be put into practice. This works on all levels (project, program, domain, portfolio, strategic). The scope of conflict analysis has to be adapted to the respective level. For example: on project level, the scope of analysis might be local, whereas on program or domain level it might be regional and/or national. The three fields of observation, partners/stakeholders, program/project and organization change accordingly. In that sense, the three steps of applying conflict sensitivity are a working tool which can be adjusted to the needs of the specific organization.
Step 1: Understanding the conflict context
Conflict analysis: An organization that is working in a fragile and conflict affected context becomes part of this context. Therefore, it is important to understand conflict actors, key driving issues and dynamics. The scope and depth of conflict analysis depends on its objective, use and the context. The conflict analysis for conflict sensitivity requires at least knowledge about dividing and connecting issues in society as well as actors of conflict. The analysis needs to be done with local partners and is to be regularly updated during project implementation. Recommended conflict analysis tools are: The conflict tree, dividers and connectors analysis, actors mapping.

Step 2: Understanding the interaction between the project/intervention and the conflict context.
What is the interaction between the identified key elements of conflict and fragility and key elements of the intervention itself? The fields of observation are: The project, the partners and stakeholders and the organizational setup. A list of sample questions help to identify relevant factors in each of these categories which are either creating tensions or having a positive impact on the conflict context.

Step 3: Adaptations and strategic choices
Based on the identified factors which are creating tensions or have a positive impact on the conflict context, strategic project, program and management decisions have to be taken. The three fields of observation, the project, the partners and stakeholders and the organizational setup, need to be considered. Adjustments of the project/program to the conflict context have to become part of the program management cycle.

4. Further Reading & Resources

- The “How To” Guide to conflict sensitivity [http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/content/how-guide](http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/content/how-guide)