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Promoting Development in Areas of Actual or Potential Violent Conflict: Approaches in Conflict Impact Assessment and Early Warning

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1. Background: Conflict and development

Most violent conflicts nowadays are taking place in developing countries. The costs of these wars are immense and can throw back a country's development efforts by years or even decades. Among them are human costs, peacekeeping and humanitarian costs, commercial and reconstruction costs, and political costs. As far as numbers can express human suffering, we may recall that during the Rwandan genocide of 1994, an estimated 800,000 persons were killed and more than 2 million forced to flee their homes. Between 1990 and 1995, Rwandan exports dropped by 60% due to internal instability (Killick/Higdom 1998). During the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 145,000 were killed, 174,000 injured, and 2,5 million people made refugees. The Bosnian GDP plunged from an estimated \$ 10 billion to \$ 2 billion between 1990 and 1996, while the costs of reconstructing Bosnia have been estimated at several billion dollars (ibid.). The rising number of conflict-related humanitarian emergencies also diverts scarce resources from long-term development to humanitarian assistance. While in the 1980s emergency relief accounted for only 3% of the total development co-operation budget of the OECD countries, this proportion has risen to 10% in the 1990s. At the same time, the total amount of international assistance has fallen sharply.

These trends prompted an intensive discussion within the development community on the relationship between aid and security. This debate has highlighted the following issues:

a. Socially sustainable development: Cases such as Rwanda, where well established development structures were not able to prevent genocide, raise fundamental questions about the type of development being supported. There is an increasing consensus that development aid should foster not only economically, but also socially sustainable structures. The prevention of violent conflict, therefore, should become an objective of long-term development strategies, which include economic, social, political and environmentally sound development.

b. Negative effects of aid: Aid frequently sustains a form of development that supports the elites and is dominated by them. Thus, in numerous cases it furthers structural instability. In situations of conflict, aid projects often inadvertently contribute to conflict while trying to achieve their internal objectives. This was the case in Somalia, where emergency aid for the victims of drought and war actually subsidised the warring factions. Even ordinary development projects can increase tensions. They may exacerbate existing rivalries by, for example, ignoring established patterns of land use or injecting resources into one impoverished region while neglecting another. Methods are required to monitor and redress these potentially negative effects of development co-operation.

c. Reactive approach to conflict: In the context of shrinking budgets, aid agencies have been called to revise their largely reactive approach to complex emergencies. Given the huge costs of war, aid can be an extremely cost-effective way of conflict prevention. For this, development and humanitarian agencies need to identify and support opportunities for peace from an early stage. This corresponds to the general shift in development thinking towards “enabling environments”, which emphasises good governance, rights-based development, and a strong civil society.

2. Coming challenges

This *new proactive approach towards humanitarian aid, development and violent conflict* poses new challenges to aid agencies, for which they require additional instruments and tools. These include conflict analysis, socially sustainable planning, identifying peace constituencies, and monitoring the conflict impact of aid activities.

How can development and humanitarian assistance help prevent violent conflict and build sustainable peace? It is important to recognise that aid cannot promote peace on its own, but should be part of a package of foreign policy measures towards a conflict-affected country or sub-region. Other relevant instruments include policy dialogue, preventive diplomacy, cultural, trade and investment policies, and military co-operation. To be effective, policy coherence between these instruments is required, which means that they all should be applied with peace as the ultimate objective in mind.

There are three main areas, in which relief, rehabilitation and development aid can play a positive role in promoting peace:

a. Long-term conflict prevention: Aid has the potential to address the structural conditions (or “root causes”), which produce violent conflict, such as social exclusion, lack of political participation, unaccountable public institutions, and lack of personal security. It can also support people in creating institutions for the peaceful resolution of social conflict and empower them to become involved in conflict prevention initiatives. Such fundamental social transformations can only be achieved in a long-term perspective. Despite ever-shortening funding cycles, aid does have the capacity to offer such long-term commitment and support to countries at risk of violent conflict.

b. Supporting peace processes: During war-peace transitions and in post-conflict situations, aid can help prepare the ground for sustainable peace. Experience has shown that political negotiations (“Track I”) are unlikely to lead to a lasting peace agreement, if they are not supported by a peace process that goes down to the grassroots. The social groundwork for peace needs to be based on participation, material benefit and security.

Participation and material benefit. In the early stages of the peace process, aid can support citizens in creating social spaces for dialogue, generating public pressure for peace and formulating a people-focused peace agenda. During peace negotiations, their role as facilitators, mediators, and witnesses can be strengthened, while later their participation in the process of reconciliation and building structures to sustain peace is essential. Aid for post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction can help build trust in the peace process by offering real material improvements to people (e.g. new business or employment opportunities) and making sure that the “peace dividend” is distributed equally among the population.

Security. The transformation from a “culture of violence” to a “culture of peace” requires that people can trust in their personal security and the institutions of justice. Prudent support for a reform of the security services can assist in bringing about this change.

c. Addressing localised violence: Development aid can support communities in dealing with localised forms of violence and conflict. Such violence can range from cattle rustling in rural Kenya to gang violence in the urban centres of Latin America. These conflicts are often associated with high number of unemployed (male) youth, the ready availability of small arms, and a deep disregard for the value of the individual life. In this context, aid can assist people to develop community-based security systems, it can address the material pre-conditions of violence and support local mediation efforts. Traditional ways of conflict resolution can be very effective in these situations and should be explored and strengthened.

3. Developing tools for planning and assessment

To enable development and humanitarian agencies to respond to the new challenges of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, new analytical tools and systems are needed. A recent review of development responses to conflict (Goodhand and Hulme, 1999) identified improved understanding, analysis and learning about the conflict environment as a major factor for the good performance of agencies in conflict-affected situations and their active contribution to peacebuilding. There are several levels, at which the knowledge and understanding of development agencies about the conflict can be improved.

a. The conflict and its dynamics: On the macro-level, agencies need a better understanding of the conflict and its dynamics. This includes long-term monitoring of the conflict situation including the main conflict and peace actors and their agendas with the aim of recognising the structural sources of conflict as well as short-term windows of opportunity for promoting peace. Such monitoring can also involve developing strategic response options, mainly on the national level. This task has traditionally been undertaken by early warning systems.

b. The role of the aid agency within the conflict context: Agencies also need to enhance their awareness of their own position within the context of conflict. Aid agencies are conflict stakeholders, too, which bring resources into the conflict, build coalitions and follow certain agendas. Agencies are encouraged to critically reflect on their position to detect and minimise any potential negative impact of their presence and work on the conflict. This issue has mainly been addressed by “Do No Harm” methodologies.

c. Strategic planning, monitoring and learning: For development agencies to contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, it is crucial to use their instruments in a systematic manner to address the root causes of conflict. Strategic planning, therefore, is extremely important. Due to the volatility of conflict situations, however, its needs to be complemented by a sensitive monitoring system, which allows project workers to detect emerging problems and react to them in time. For this purpose, “Conflict Impact Assessment” methods are being developed, which mainly focus on the programme and project level.

Here we will review lessons learned primarily from early warning and conflict impact assessment methods.

3.1. Early warning methods

Within the field of early warning, methodologies exist for the long-term monitoring of latent or open violent conflicts. Methods have been developed by a range of state and non-state actors. Emphasis here will be placed on the efforts of non-state organisations.

A review of the conflict early warning field by Rupsinghe, Nyheim and Khan (1999) emphasises that currently there is no consensus on what constitutes “good” early warning practice for conflict. It directs attention to the need to marry quantitative and qualitative approaches to early warning, draw on multiple information sources, and use insider and local

knowledge for analytical purposes. Rupesinghe et al. also stress that networks are emerging as the most effective and strategic system for early warning, in so far as they allow for pooling different information sources (dynamic, local, structural), methods of analysis (quantitative and qualitative, local and international), and the overall sharing of the burden (resources, risk) of early warning.

Applied practice by the members of the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) shows that when the above principles are observed, “early warning” comes from the regular monitoring of three elements: (a) conflict generating factors (e.g. arms, poverty, corruption, etc.); (b) agendas of the conflicting parties (e.g. armed struggle, etc.); and (c) peace efforts (overt or covert and their effectiveness). The broad simplistic equation is one where: (a) + (b) - (c) = trends. It is clear that although an understanding of (a) can be gained from external sources, (b) and (c) require local analysis and knowledge.

However, effective early warning is one to which there is response. Critical in linking warning to response are frameworks which enable ownership of the analysis among stakeholders and catalyse relevant and concerted preventive action at a number of levels, by multiple actors and in multiple sectors.

Conflict analysis needs to reflect local perspectives as it will set the basis for action that local communities eventually have to live with. It also needs to be owned by different actors who can impact on conflict and peace dynamics in a given region. Hence, FEWER’s members are convening strategic round-tables where different actors (e.g. local NGOs, governments, IGOs, external actors) agree on what are the conflict generating factors and what can be done about the situation.

The early warning experience highlights different methodological issues (methods and sources) as well as broader systemic approaches (inclusive processes) as key lessons learned. These can enhance the development of conflict impact assessment methods.

3.2. Conflict impact assessment methods

In the area of conflict impact assessment, distinctive methodologies have been developed to suit its different tasks. Among them are:

a) Indicator or issue-based analytical frameworks: Such frameworks have been designed mainly for decision-makers, who want to gain a more systematic understanding of the conflict situation in a country for the use of macro-level planning. The aim is to take the analyst through different conflict-relevant areas in a country’s political, economic and social structure and help him decide, where and how aid could be used most strategically to address conflict causes. Indicator-based frameworks ask the analyst to give ratings to predefined indicators and thus calculate sectoral “risk” scores. Issue-based frameworks are more open and invite the user to think through certain analytical areas such as context, systems, institutions, attitudes, forces for peace and conflict and reach strategic conclusions.

b) Open frameworks for participatory consultation: The core of these methodologies is the consultation with and active involvement of the peace stakeholders in the analytical exercise. They often rely on an analytical framework of the issue-based type, which is discussed and filled in during one or a series of workshops. This methodology is useful for strategic planning processes both on the macro and the micro-level. On the macro-level, consultations will mainly involve representatives from the government, civil society and other interest groups. On the micro-level, the methodology provides space for consultations with beneficiary groups and other stakeholders.

c) Self-monitoring and impact research: Given the process orientation of conflict prevention and peacebuilding work, conflict-sensitive strategic planning needs to be supported by an ongoing monitoring process, which takes account both of the work process of the organisation as well as its impact on the conflict environment. Though still at an early stage, approaches are being developed that enable organisations to reflect periodically on their own ways of working (“reflexive monitoring”). These need to be complemented by periodic impact assessments of the organisation’s work, for which social research and stakeholder consultations are the methods of choice. This form of continual information gathering can become crucial for crisis management, when the project has to deal with minor or major conflict-related difficulties.

From the work of International Alert and Saferworld, a holistic approach to conflict impact assessment is emerging. A metaphor can be drawn from architecture. In building a house (“peace”), a number of elements are important: (a) the bricks and other material; (b) the builders; (c) the architecture; and (d) the inhabitant of the house. Also, one will have to consider whether a house is built in a draught, earthquake, cyclone (etc) prone environment. The instruments (development aid, security measures, etc.) required for building peace are numerous (“bricks and other material”). Different actors (e.g. governments, IGOs, NGOs) have varying capacities for peace-building (“builders”). Strategic and long-term objectives for peace (“architecture”) are critical for any peace-building effort, and need to reflect both the instruments and actors available, and have legitimacy among communities in conflict affected areas (“inhabitants”). The flow of arms in the region or raging conflicts in neighbouring states (“environment”) need to be considered.

4. Discussion

In the context of conflict impact assessment, early warning can play a critical role in helping define and monitor the “environment” in which peace-building takes place. In addition, a number of lessons learned for conflict impact assessment can be drawn from the early warning field.

- Conflict situations are highly dynamic and fluid. They offer a complex operating environment. Any assessment of development activities needs to contextualise these by systematically monitoring conflict *and* peace dynamics using a range of methods and sources.
- Good early warning practice emphasises drawing on local analytical capacities to understand conflict dynamics. The impact of development activities on conflict needs to draw not only on beneficiary consultations and other standard approaches in evaluation methods, but also local assessments of the context in (“environment”) and objectives for (“architecture”) which these activities are implemented.
- Peace needs to be owned (the “architecture” needs to be defined by the “inhabitant”), and the definition of peace objectives necessitates an inclusive process where a range of stakeholders are convened.

It is important, therefore, to not only view impact assessment of development aid as requiring only a methodology, but also consider the broader system and processes in which the methodology needs to be applied.

We have learned that peace processes can only be sustainable when they are led or at least supported by the peace stakeholders themselves. External intervention is most effective when it provides assistance to ongoing local or national processes. In order to achieve this,

agencies need to listen to and engage with stakeholders on an ongoing basis. Stakeholders, however, do not only include the “good” ones, that is those parties campaigning for peace. It is equally important to consider the agendas and needs of the parties to the war, particularly their rank and file, to achieve sustainable solutions.

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