

Benchmarking Paper – Short Overview

Background to the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium:

“The Practice of Conflict Sensitivity – from concept to impact” is a four year project funded by DFID and managed and implemented by The Conflict Sensitivity Consortium. The Consortium is formed of 10 organisations in 4 focus countries. ActionAid (lead agency in Kenya), Care International UK (lead agency in UK and Sri Lanka), International Alert, Plan UK, Responding to Conflict, CAFOD, Saferworld, Save the Children UK, Skillshare, and World Vision UK (lead agency in Sierra Leone).

The project has five key objectives: (1) To increase the conflict sensitivity capacity of Consortium members and wider civil society. (2) To improve policies and practices that support conflict sensitivity within the Consortium. (3) To increase donors’ understanding of and commitment to funding conflict sensitivity. (4) To develop tools and methodologies for integrating conflict sensitivity. (5) To document and share learning on conflict sensitive approaches.

Background to this version of the Benchmarking Paper:

In early 2009, at the start of the Project, the UK Consortium produced a ‘Benchmarking Paper’¹ to build consensus and a common working definition of conflict sensitivity². In early 2010 the UK Consortium decided to produce an abridged version of the Benchmarking Paper that can more easily be shared with a wider audience, and as a result this paper was developed.

Hypothesis behind Conflict sensitivity:

The use of “Conflict sensitivity” terminology has evolved from the “Do No Harm” concept in the late 1990s, and is based on the hypothesis that any initiative conducted in a conflict-affected area will interact with that conflict and such interaction will have consequences that may have positive and negative effects on that conflict.

As such, recognising the unintended consequences of interventions is central to conflict sensitivity. For example:

- Humanitarian assistance can inadvertently provide material assistance to the authority controlling the operational area, for example through diversion, taxation, hijacking of assets/infrastructure;
- Agencies can appear to be taking sides with the military in situations where military aims and logistical requirements of NGOs coincide (such as keeping roads open). In many cases, the military is party to the conflict.
- Agencies can inadvertently provide legitimacy to the controlling authority. For example when forced relocation is disguised as a feeding programme, or when conflict actors control access and thus achieve status as they have to be negotiated with;
- Actors in a conflict situation can manipulate access/targeting to support their own constituency.
- Development projects in any country/ context may inadvertently create or exacerbate already existing tensions by favouring one ethnic/ social/ religious group or by being perceived to have political affiliations or a ‘hidden agenda’.

Organisational mandates/priorities and CSA:

Conflict sensitivity is relevant to agencies with different mandates, however it is recognised that organisational mandates affect how each agency views the relevance of conflict sensitivity. For

¹ The full version of the benchmarking paper is available at the Consortium’s website: www.conflictsensitivity.org

² An annotated bibliography developed in connection to the Benchmarking paper is available on www.conflictsensitivity.org

peace building agencies conflict sensitivity is important as promoting peace is at the heart of their mandates. For development and multi-mandate agencies conflict sensitivity is important as conflict is an important factor contributing to underlying causes of poverty, inequality and social injustice.

Key questions for defining conflict sensitivity:

The UK Consortium, through the Benchmarking Paper, developed responses to the key questions posed when defining conflict sensitivity:

Q: In which contexts is conflict sensitivity required?

A: Conflict sensitivity applies to all contexts, regardless of the severity or frequency of violence, even in situations where underlying tensions have not recently resulted in violence.

Q: What does conflict sensitivity mean to my organisation – project tool or broader?

A: Conflict sensitivity applies across and throughout all areas of our work, in all contexts and should be applied as an institutional approach.

Q: What types of work do I need to apply conflict sensitivity to?

A: Conflict sensitivity applies to all types of work, to encompass humanitarian, development and peacebuilding, also including, where appropriate, work conducted by local civil society, government or private sector partners.

Q: Does a CSA necessitate a change in organisational mandate & how much peace building do we need to do in order to be conflict-sensitive?

A: Conflict sensitivity does not require changing mandates/priorities/objectives or of an organisation to include explicit peace building or conflict prevention. It is about minimising negative and maximising positive impacts within an organisation's given mandate.

UK Conflict Sensitivity Consortium definition of conflict sensitivity:

From these questions the Consortium agreed the following definition:

“A conflict sensitive approach involves gaining a sound understanding of the two-way interaction between activities and context³ and acting to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of interventions on conflict, within an organisation's given priorities/objectives (mandate)”

In a nutshell:

Conflict Sensitivity is: Knowing that our work could increase existing conflicts or create new ones, and doing something about it.

³ Through conflict analysis