# CONFLICT SENSITIVITY CONSORTIUM BENCHMARKING PAPER

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## Abstract

To be completed.

# Part 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the Consortium

Violent conflict disproportionately affects some of the poorest countries and poorest people in the world. 'By 2010, half the world's poorest people could be living in states that are experiencing, or at risk of, violent conflict. Tackling violent conflict and its underlying cause is essential if we are to make progress in the fight against world poverty… Of the 34 countries furthest from reaching the Millennium Development Goals, 22 are in the midst of – or emerging from – violent conflict.'[1]

Many organisations are active in conflict affected areas, bringing with them a multitude of mandates and ways of working. Noted amongst these actors are governments (including donors), civil society (including local and international NGOs), and multi-national organisations. Each actor brings specific priorities and objectives that relate to their mandate, such as a primary focus on poverty reduction, maximising profit, saving lives, improving human rights, improving education etc.

Many actors active in conflict affected areas have grown aware of the need for conflict sensitivity. Such awareness has led 10 INGOs to form a consortium to look into conflict sensitivity in more depth.

The Conflict Sensitivity Consortium comprises of 10[2] development, peacebuilding and multi-mandate INGOS, who share recognition of the importance of conflict sensitivity and a commitment to improving the application of conflict sensitivity throughout their programming. Together we have developed a 3.5 year project, "Conflict Sensitivity – Concept to Impact", funded by DFID, to share experience and raise capacity in CSA mainstreaming.

The consortium project is aiming to reach out across agencies with different mandates (humanitarian, development, peacebuilding) and promote the mainstreaming/integration of conflict sensitivity across all such programming, regardless of mandate.

## 1.2 Purpose of the benchmarking paper

This paper was developed by members of the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, in the inception phase of the DFID-funded project "Conflict Sensitivity – Concept to Impact".

This paper seeks to set out the different interpretations of the concept of conflict sensitivity, in order to provoke discussion amongst the consortium members and build consensus. This is to provide a solid foundation upon which future consortium work will be built to improve practice in conflict sensitivity. This paper has drawn upon an earlier consortium-commissioned desk review (by independent consultant Sarah Bayne), which annotated key academic, practitioner and donor strategies/policies related to conflict sensitivity. This desk review focused solely on global strategies and policies, and has not at this stage drawn upon country-specific literature or "lessons learnt" documentation, which

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[1] DFID (2006) *Preventing Violent Conflict* ppii-1
[2] Action Aid, CAFOD, CARE International, International Alert, Plan, Responding to Conflict, Saferworld, Save the Children, Skillshare International, World Vision

will be reviewed in the next phase of the consortium work. The annotated bibliography will be available on the consortium website[3] later in 2009.

In order to inform consortium discussion and consensus building, this paper also provides a brief overview of the current field of conflict sensitivity: tracing the history of conflict sensitivity to provide a contextual background for the current state of play. It highlights key definitions and major variances identified in relevant literature. The paper then identifies key questions to be addressed in order to develop a consensual definition of conflict sensitivity. Recognising the different mandates of the consortium partners, the paper also seeks to ground the concept of conflict sensitivity into the mandates of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding agencies. However the paper does not seek to make the business case for conflict sensitivity – this will be focused upon in more depth throughout the consortium project.

A first draft of this paper was been developed ahead of a consortium workshop in February 2009 entitled 'Defining Conflict Sensitivity'. At this workshop the consortium explored the issues presented in this paper, aiming to develop consensus on a working definition of conflict sensitivity. This paper is the product of discussions amongst all consortium agencies at that workshop. The definitions arrived at in this paper is now helping determine the focus and scope for the remaining three years of this consortium initiative.

### 1.3 Consortium mandates/priorities and conflict sensitivity

The Consortium members believe that conflict sensitivity is relevant to agencies with different mandates – humanitarian, development and peacebuilding, and that organisational mandates affect how each agency views the relevance of conflict sensitivity.

*Humanitarian mandates* - Actors (NGOs/donors) with a primarily humanitarian mandate active in conflict affected areas focus predominantly on the short-term objective of saving lives.

*Development mandates* - Actors with longer-term development mandates active in conflict affected areas may focus on a number of different objectives, ranging from a focus on poverty reduction, to improved rights/entitlements, to reducing vulnerability, or focusing on specific groups or sectors (such as children, women, elderly, disabled, health, education, water).

*Peacebuilding mandates* – Actors with mandates aimed at promoting sustainable peace active in conflict affected areas are likely to focus on objectives related to reducing violence and addressing underlying causes of conflict. Naturally, there is considerable overlap between applying a conflict sensitive approach to programmatic peacebuilding activities, and actions to ensure the quality and effectiveness of such peacebuilding activities. This overlap has and continues to lead to some confusion between conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding, but this paper will endeavour to draw a clear distinction between the two.

Consortium members each have their own interpretation of why conflict sensitivity is important to their mandate:

Peacebuilding agencies have mandates and missions focusing on preventing/reducing violent conflict and promoting peace. For peace-building

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[3] www.conflictsensitivity.org

agencies, conflict sensitivity is important as promoting peace is at the heart of their mandates.

Development and multi-mandate agencies have mandates and missions to eradicate poverty, inequality and social injustice. 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.

## Part 2: Background of conflict sensitivity

### 2.1 Introduction to conflict sensitivity

Conflict sensitivity is based on the hypothesis that:

1. Any initiative conducted in a conflict-affected area will interact with that conflict

2. Such interaction will have consequences that may have positive or negative effects on that conflict

Experiences from the field have demonstrated that all interventions – be they humanitarian, development or peacebuilding - in conflict contexts have some kind of interaction with that context. These interactions can contribute to peace, or to violence. Following is a brief summary of the academic literature that has documented how humanitarian, development or peacebuilding interventions have contributed to violent conflict[4].

### 2.2 Recognising the unintended consequences of interventions

Academic studies of famine have demonstrated that **famine is an instrument of war** for depopulating an area, forcing asset transfers (particularly land) and removing civilian cover for rebel groups. For example De Waal[5] identified that in Ethiopia the Dergue's war on the Oromo Liberation Front included direct offensives on grain stores, bombing markets, restricting movement and trade, and forced relocation; all major components of famine creation. With stores destroyed, people forced to hold markets at night, transport having to go off-road, grain prices hiked through movement restriction, and people unable to search for work elsewhere, coping strategies were rendered impossible. Drought and harvest failure were contributory but not causal factors to the famine that ensued in 1983-5.

For *humanitarian* actors this could mean that their intervention – such as to provide urgent food relief to a population – could be diametrically opposed to those from whom they must seek permission to gain access. For *development* actors this could mean that their intervention – such as to improve social safety nets to prevent people living on the edge of an emergency from slipping into famine – could be targeted or impeded by those seeking to strip people of their traditional means of protection and force them to sell their assets. This was observed by Keen[6] in Sudan, who noted that the government policies inciting raids on the Dinka and scorched earth policies had stripped the Dinka of their traditional means of protection from famine, precipitating a massive asset transfer of land and wealth. Deliberate price fixing of grain vis-à-vis livestock in 'forced markets', prohibitions on movement and on non-market means to gain

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[4] It is notable that the academic literature on the linkage between humanitarian assistance and conflict is quite extensive, while the literature on the linkages between development assistance and conflict is relatively scant

[5] De Waal (1997) *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* London: James Currey

6 Keen (1994) The Functions of Famine in Southwestern Sudan: Implications for Relief in Macrae, Zwi & Duffield *War and Hunger: Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies*: Zed Books, London

food, such as foraging, and inadequate relief, exploited a relatively wealthy but powerless group. For *peacebuilding* actors this could mean that their intervention – such as to create dialogue between opposing parties – could misinterpret the objectives of a belligerent and accept asset transfer as an unavoidable consequence of famine rather than that famine was a deliberate tactic of asset transfer.

This creates a hugely challenging context.

Drawing from analysis of field operations, many writers such as Prendergast[7], Slim[8], African Rights[9], and Le Billon[10] identify **aid as an instrument of war** – where it is delivered without sufficient analysis and awareness. These writers, and others, identify a whole host of means for this to occur, such as
- Relief providing material assistance to the authority controlling the operational area (such as through diversion, taxation, hijacking of assets/infrastructure);
- Agencies providing strategic protection whereby military aims and logistical requirements of NGOs coincide (such as keeping roads open);
- Agencies providing legitimacy to the controlling authority (such as where forced relocation was disguised as a feeding programme, or where conflict actors achieve status through controlling access and thus having to be negotiated with);
- Conflict actors manipulating access/targeting to increase competition or possibly only support their constituency.

De Waal's analysis of *humanitarian* aid in Somalia (1992) and post-genocide Rwanda[11] has decried the role of aid in sustaining violence, the latter intervention being a key milestone in the growth of the field of conflict sensitivity. In Zaire the setting up of relief operations for people fleeing Rwanda played into the hands of the genocidaires who expected international support to flow to them as refugees. Responsibilities within the camps were delegated to those who had held civil authority inside Rwanda (and thus who had been the machinery of the genocide), and who then took control of the camps, exploiting relief in order to consolidate their own power and to launch attacks against Rwanda. The camps remained a place of violence and intimidation, and subsequent fighting resulted in over 200,000 camp inhabitants being killed. Seaman, paraphrasing Clauswitz, has called *"relief the continuation of politics by other means."*

Uvin's[12] work on the role of *development* aid in the Rwandan genocide identifies how aid and the Rwandan state were deeply intertwined, making it inseparable from domestic socio-economic and political processes. Thus foreign aid supported the state which perpetuated structural violence that lay at the root of the genocide. Research by Goodhand and Atkinson[13] into *development* aid in Sri Lanka identified how donor-funded programmes have exacerbated conflict – such as through supporting an education system that reinforced ethnic differences.

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[7] Prendergast (1996) *Frontline Diplomacy: Humanitarian Aid and Conflict in Africa*
[8] Slim (1997) International Humanitarianism's Engagement with Civil War in the 1990s: A Glance at Evolving Practice and Theory *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* www.jha.ac/articles/a033.htm
[9] African Rights (1994) Humanitarianism Unbound? Current Dilemmas Facing Multi-Mandate Relief Operations in Political Emergencies African Rights, London. *Discussion Paper No. 5*
[10] Le Billon (2000) *The Political Economy of war – what relief agencies need to know* Humanitarian Practice network Paper 3*3*
[11] De Waal (1997) *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Afric*a London: James Currey
[12] Uvin *Aiding violence – the development enterprise in Rwanda* (1998) Kumarian Press
[13] Goodhand & Atkinson (2001) *Conflict and Aid: Enhancing the Peacebuilding Impact of International Engagement*. A Synthesis of Findings from Afghanistan, Liberia and Sri Lanka International Alert

Research into *peacebuilding* programming in Kosovo has identified instances where peacebuilding programmes, based on a poor understanding of the conflict context, has actively contributed to conflict[14].

This documented experience of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding interventions having negative consequences for conflict has led to growing appreciation of the need for conflict sensitivity. The earliest 'Do No Harm' work grew out of the field of humanitarian aid, but in recent years conflict sensitivity has been championed by peacebuilding actors, with some challenges remaining for humanitarian actors (see section 6 – areas for further consortium analysis).

## 2.3    The evolution of the field of conflict sensitivity

The field of conflict sensitivity has evolved through several phases. These were originally described by Paffenholz[15] and are here updated by the authors of this paper:

Phase 1        mid-late 1990s
The development of early project level tools including 'Do No Harm'[16]; 'Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment'[17], a macro policy level assessment 'Conflict Impact Assessment System'[18] and donor communications/efforts promoting the need for impact assessment[19].

Phase 2        late 1990s to mid 2000s
The proliferation of agency-specific tools - many of these focussed only on conflict analysis, without providing an adequate link to programming. There was also an expansion into field testing of tools. Confusions began to emerge over the labels used, particularly the term PCIA (Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment) which described both a particular approach and became a label for a wide range of approaches and concepts. The term 'conflict sensitivity' was thus promoted as an umbrella term to cover the myriad of different approaches and reflect the shift of focus beyond simply assessing impact.

Phase 3        mid to late 2000s
The term 'conflict sensitivity' has been taken up extensively across the field. Several authors and agencies have continued to further refine their specific tools[20], while donors and implementing agencies have undertaken mainstreaming efforts and documented lessons learned in application[21]. There have also been efforts to apply conflict sensitivity to other fields, including to the private sector. The expansion of the field of conflict sensitivity has triggered discussion in the field of peacebuilding on evaluation and the demonstration of change. This has

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[14] CDA Collaborative Learning Projects & CARE International (July 2006) *Has Peacebuilding made a Difference in Kosovo?* A Study of the Effectiveness of Peacebuilding in Preventing Violence: Lessons Learned from the March 2004 Riots in Kosovo

[15] Paffenholz (2005), Third-generation PCIA: Introducing the Aid for Peace Approach in New Trends in Peace and Conflict Assessment, *Berghof Handbook: Dialogue no. 4*, Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Management. This representation expands beyond Paffenholz's content

[16] CDA – 1999

[17] Bush – 1998

[18] Reychler 1999

[19] OECD DAC

[20] For example, Paffenholz and Reychler have updated earlier approaches in their publication *Aid for Peace: A Guide to Planning and Evaluation for Conflict Zones*, NOMOS, 2007

[21] DFID, for example, has recently undertaken a review of its Strategic Conflict Assessment tool with a view to updating its approach.

lead to further reflection and piloting of means to monitor and evaluate the impact on conflict and peace of peacebuilding[22], with attention also turning to the need to expand work focusing on the impact of conflict sensitivity. Numerous donors have made a commitment to conflict sensitivity, without having made the strong conceptual and practical linkages to relevant related areas, such as fragile states/stabilisation, and other policy areas such as trade.

Phase 4        late 2000s onwards
Significant concerted efforts amongst implementing agencies are emerging – a joint evaluation of tsunami response in Sri Lanka, and this current CHF consortium. Similarly, donors have developed principled conflict sensitive engagement at a national level – such as the donor principles of Sri Lanka. Training courses are being developed by a range of different conflict specialist agencies, and further efforts to enhance monitoring and evaluation of peacebuilding have been undertaken, such as the OECD DAC Guidance on Evaluating Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities (working draft, 2008). However challenges to the business case still remain, as do challenges to operationalise conflict sensitivity in the field.

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[22] OECD DAC evaluation of peacebuilding

# Part 3: Defining Conflict Sensitivity

## 3.1 Convergence found in the literature

The desk review (see section 1.2) drew together an extensive collection of literature related to conflict sensitivity, and found a broad consensus behind the concept. The majority of documents reviewed utilised the term 'conflict sensitivity' or a 'conflict sensitive approach'. Those that did not use the term did however, recognised the concept of conflict sensitivity, even if that was couched in other terminology.

The literature showed broad consensus (with a few exceptions) in recognising the potential for interventions to have both negative impacts *and* positive impacts on at all stages of conflict. The literature also showed broad consensus that conflict analysis would be an important component in gaining a clearer understanding of the potential two-way interactions between interventions and conflict dynamics.

Many sources followed the resource pack[23] definition of conflict sensitivity:

Conflict sensitivity is the ability to:
- Understand the context in which you operate;
- Understand the interaction between your intervention and the context;
- Act upon the understanding of this interaction, in order to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts.


## 3.2 Divergence in the literature

The desk review also showed a few key areas of divergence in the literature.

While the term 'conflict-sensitive approaches' has clearly gained currency among a wide range of actors and is widely used in donor, INGO and academic policies and strategies, there are still areas of divergence, corresponding to four questions:

a) What types of contexts do we need to apply conflict sensitivity in?

b) When, where and how should we apply CSA – programming tool or broader?

c) To what types of work does CSA apply?

d) How much peacebuilding do we need to do in order to be conflict-sensitive?


These can be broadly divided into divergent views of the intent, scope and application of conflict sensitivity – each of these will be dealt with in the following sub-sections.

In each section, the different perspectives and areas of creative tension are set out, drawing on the desk review.

For each question, a consolidated position for the CSA consortium is then suggested.

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[23] Fewer et al (2005), Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: A resource Pack

### 3.3 Key questions for defining conflict sensitivity

#### a) In which contexts is conflict sensitivity required?

*Problem statement*

While there seems to be agreement that conflict sensitivity should be applied in contexts affected by conflict, different agencies place different emphasis on what this means.

*What does the literature say?*

Some argue that, due to the need to address structural causes of conflict or structural violence, conflict sensitivity should be applied in all conflict-affected contexts, including where conflict is latent, in other words where there is no violence occurring[24]. Others focus on post-conflict and transition contexts in particular[25], while yet others have started to make the link between conflict-affected and fragile situations[26]. It is worth noting that all of the CSA Consortium members who have explicit policy/strategy statements on conflict sensitivity, state the need for conflict sensitivity to be applied to all stages of conflict.

*So...what types of contexts do I need to apply conflict sensitivity in? The CSA consortium says...*

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.

#### b) What does conflict sensitivity mean to my organisation – project tool or broader?

*Problem statement*

There seems to be divergence around whether conflict sensitivity is a philosophy, an overarching approach, a tool or a process of change and different organisations interpret this differently.

*What does the literature say?*

Most of the donor literature emphasises the need for conflict sensitivity in macro and country strategies, and many of them recognise the need to take conflict sensitivity into programming work as well, including micro level work. For these purposes, conflict sensitivity is an approach to strategising, and in some cases for monitoring and evaluating work. However, many INGOs (as well as the CSA Resource Pack and some of the academic literature) see conflict sensitivity as a programming approach that should be applied to the project/programme level, but also to sectoral and macro policy levels. Many donors and INGOs recognise institutional implications of adopting conflict sensitivity, although perhaps more from the perspective of recognising the need for resources to support the uptake of conflict sensitivity in strategies and programmes. Much less attention is paid to

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[24] OECD DAC (2001), *Guidelines on Helping to Prevent Violent Conflict*
[25] JICA (March 2006), *Handbook for Transition Assistance and JICA* (November 2003), Thematic Guidelines on Peacebuilding Assistance
[26] OECD (2007), *Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States; EC Communication* (2007), ibid.

elements of institutionalisation such as the need for conflict-sensitive recruitment and procurement policies.

### *So...what does conflict sensitivity mean to my organisation? The CSA Consortium says...*

Conflict sensitivity applies across and throughout all areas of our work and should be applied as an institutional approach.

### c) What types of work do I need to apply conflict sensitivity to?

### *Problem statement*

Most of the work on conflict sensitivity so far has been on development, and to a lesser extent on humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding. There are however, other fields that would also benefit from this approach, but only a few actors have recognised these links. There is also not much discussion about whether conflict sensitivity is mainly an approach for interventions undertaken by actors external to the conflict-affected contexts, or whether this is an approach that should also be encouraged within conflict-affected societies, e.g. by national or local government, local civil society etc.

### *What does the literature say?*

A number of interesting references emerge from the literature, including the need to look at the conflict impact of trade policies[27], business practice[28] or private sector work and security and justice sector interventions[29]. One notable issue was that whilst INGO and academic literature focused on the need for conflict sensitivity in humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work, donor policies, notably humanitarian policies almost completely omitted reference to the need for conflict sensitive humanitarian assistance, despite this being the field within which conflict sensitivity first emerged. This represents a significant gap. Some of the academic and INGO literature[30] also refers to the need for conflict sensitivity to be applied by other actors within the conflict-affected contexts, but not much has been captured in policies and strategies about this.

### *So...what types of work do I need to apply conflict sensitivity to? The CSA Consortium says...*

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.

The near absence of donor literature on conflict sensitivity in humanitarian aid is one incentive for the Consortium including a pilot emergency project, which

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[27] Council of the EU (2005), *Council Common Position concerning Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in Africa*;
[28] International Alert (2005), *Conflict-sensitive Business Practice: Guidance for Extractive Industries and UN Global Compact Business Guide for Conflict Impact Assessment and Risk Management (2002)*
[29] Saferworld (2009), *Saferworld strategy on conflict sensitivity (2009-2011)*
[30] See for example Barbloet et al (2005) The Utility and Dilemmas of Conflict Sensitivity in New Trends in Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment. Berghof Handbook: Dialogue No. 4, Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management, and Fewer et al (2005), Conflict-sensitiveapproaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: A resource Pack

should produce some interesting lessons learnt on the application of conflict sensitivity in humanitarian aid work.

### d) *How much peacebuilding do we need to do in order to be conflict-sensitive?*

### *Problem statement*

While there is apparent convergence on the need for external interventions (whether development, humanitarian or peacebuilding) not to cause or aggravate conflict, there seems to be divergence about the extent to which each of these fields of work should actively aim to contribute to peace.

### *What does the literature say?*

Although the field of conflict sensitivity largely originated in the humanitarian aid field, in recent years it has rather fallen off the radar in the humanitarian field and has been championed by the peacebuilding community. The vast majority of recent academic and practitioner contributions to the literature have come from a peacebuilding perspective. Since peacebuilding as a sector prioritises reducing or avoiding conflict, there has been some conflation of the terms. This confusion is amplified by the blurs and overlaps between peacebuilding and other sectors (humanitarian assistance, development). In particular the peacebuilding objective of 'positive peace' and the rights-based development objective of 'social justice' are very similar end points, involving very similar changes. This could indeed represent a level of harmonisation or even homogenisation between these two fields.

The literature is not particularly helpful in distinguishing between conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding. In many policies or strategies (donors, INGOs and academics), conflict sensitivity is wrapped together with peacebuilding, conflict mitigation or conflict prevention[31]. This is probably partly a function of the need to situate thinking on conflict-sensitivity somewhere relevant, but also indicates some conceptual murkiness about the difference (or indeed whether there is a difference) between conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding/conflict prevention. In many agencies conflict sensitivity is grouped together with peacebuilding in terms of policies, strategies and expertise. For many activities conflict sensitivity specialism is found within teams that also (or primarily) focus on peacebuilding. This institutional decision means that many policies on conflict sensitivity are found in 'conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding policies' where an explicit distinction between the two is not required.

Some strategies see conflict-sensitive development as contributing to the root or underlying causes of conflict[32], or even see development as being part of an overarching peacebuilding strategy[33] which supports a vision of deliberately contributing to peace and which some agencies would see as 'peacebuilding-focused'. Others make a distinction between conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding,

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[31] An example is the Sector Strategy for Crisis Prevention, Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding in German Development Cooperation (2005). By contrast Sida (Promoting Peace and Security through Development Cooperation, 2005) is unusual in that it views peacebuilding as closely related to, but distinct from conflict-sensitivity.

[32] This language is used in the EC Communication (2007), *Towards an EU response to situations of fragility – engaging in difficult environments for sustainable development, stability and peace*; Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (May 2004), *Peacebuilding – a Development Framework;*

[33] Paffenholz, T. (2005), "Peace and Conflict Sensitivity in International Cooperation, An Introductory Overview", *International Politics and Society*, Vol. 4

describing conflict sensitivity as working *in* conflict, with peacebuilding working *on* conflict.

Another area of overlap is that for both conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding, there is a need to monitor and evaluate impact on conflict dynamics either as the main impact of the work or as an indirect or secondary impact. The literature dealing with evaluation of peacebuilding (e.g. the Reflecting of Peace Practice or the OECD DAC evaluation guidance) may therefore be relevant to conflict-sensitive development as well as peacebuilding.

Some literature also considers the application of conflict sensitivity to peacebuilding work. This area is perhaps more challenging as it may be more difficult to acknowledge that peacebuilding work can be conflict blind, or perhaps because conflict-sensitive peacebuilding work is seen as synonymous with good/effective peacebuilding.

Overall the literature lacks clarity in distinguishing conflict sensitivity from peacebuilding. The confusion has not been helped by the common convention of viewing a continuum from conflict blind, through to conflict sensitive through to peacebuilding programming. It was felt by the benchmarking paper team that such a continuum was not helpful as it implied that conflict sensitivity was inherently a step towards peacebuilding, and it also implied that peacebuilding work could not be conflict blind (or did not need to be conflict sensitive).

### *So...how much peacebuilding do we need to do in order to be conflict-sensitive? The CSA Consortium says...*

The benchmarking paper team decided that the question identifiable in the current literature (how far into peacebuilding do I need to go to be conflict sensitive) was the wrong question and was not helpful in progressing the debate.

Instead the benchmarking paper team identified two alternative definitions for conflict sensitivity, one that defines conflict sensitivity as minimising negatives and maximising positives within mandate, and one that has an additional requirement that agencies include peacebuilding as an explicit objective. These two alternatives (discussed in part 4 below) were developed to make the debate clearer and to enable the consortium to develop a clear working definition of conflict sensitivity.

This paper maintains that a clear distinction between conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding is useful and indeed essential if CSA is to be effectively mainstreamed across a broad range of actors.

## Part 4: Towards a Consortium Working Definition of CSA

### 4.1 The need for a consortium working definition

It is suggested that we need to arrive at a clear working definition of conflict sensitivity in order to be able to proceed in our consortium activities with a clear and explicit idea of what we mean by the term 'conflict sensitive approach'.

### 4.2 Two identified variants

Drawing upon the definitions highlighted by the desk review, and following substantive discussion within the benchmarking paper team, the benchmarking paper team developed the following suggestions for a consortium definition. This definition is underpinned by the recognition that all activities[34] in conflict-affected contexts[35] will interact with that context, with potential unintended consequences that can be either negative (contributing to conflict) or positive (contributing to peace).

We have identified two alternative definitions:

**Position 1:**   A conflict sensitive approach involves gaining a sound understanding of the two-way interaction between activities and context[36] and acting to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of interventions on conflict, within an organization's given priorities/objectives (mandate).

**Position 2**:   A conflict sensitive approach involves gaining a sound understanding of the two-way interaction between activities and context[37] and acting to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of interventions on conflict, and actively including peacebuilding as a primary or secondary objective.

*What is the difference between definition 1 and definition 2?*

Definition 1 makes it clear that solely 'avoiding harm' is insufficient for conflict sensitivity. Instead organisations need to both minimise negative consequences and maximise positive consequences, within their original mandate/priorities.

Definition 2 is moving from conflict sensitivity within original mandate/priorities, to adoption of mandates/priorities that are more focused on peacebuilding as a priority, adding objectives focused directly on peacebuilding (reducing violence or underlying causes of violent conflict) as an explicit priority.

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[34] including development assistance, peacebuilding and humanitarian activities
[35] whether in situations of violent or latent conflict
[36] through conflict analysis
[37] through conflict analysis

### 4.3 CSA According to mandate and values

We felt it was important to clarify that:

1. Different mandates are beneficial
2. Not every agency can or should do explicit peacebuilding (see definition 2)
3. In order for conflict sensitivity to be effectively mainstreamed across all types of agencies (humanitarian, development, peacebuilding) it is important to clarify that conflict sensitivity does not require changing mandates/priorities/objectives – instead it is about minimising negative and maximising positive impacts within a given mandate.


### 4.4 Variant one or variant two

An organisation that achieves conflict sensitivity as defined in position 1 above would then face three options:

1. Their heightened awareness of conflict may lead them to adapt their priorities/mandate to adopt peacebuilding as an explicit primary or secondary objective, leading them into explicit peacebuilding work.
2. Despite heightened awareness of conflict they may decide that it is not within their mandate/skill set to do any explicit peacebuilding work, and so they will undertake activities that contribute to peace where these explicitly link to their mandate and planned intervention and nothing more.
3. Despite heightened awareness of conflict they may decide that it is not within their mandate/skill set to do any explicit peacebuilding work, yet where they come across conflict opportunities and threats that they themselves will not respond to, they will seek to find partners with appropriate mandates and capacity to step in and take on explicit peacebuilding work.

Which of the three options above is chosen will depend on a variety of factors:

*Mandate and organisational goals*
Development, peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance and multi-mandated organisations usually articulate an institutional philosophy or direction, which can take different shapes. Some may operate within a particular religious framework while others may develop a set of values or principles, for example respect for human rights and international law. These defining statements indicate to supporters and donors what type of organisation it is and therefore whether they would like to support the work. It also provides the broader framework within which organisations make decisions about what types of activities they will do, who they will work with, and often how they will work (e.g. through rights-based approaches, participatory approaches, empowerment etc). When organisations therefore attempt to conflict-sensitise their work, their mandate and goals will determine what shape this will take.

Each of the three different mandates – humanitarian, development and peacebuilding – create their own 'lens' through which these agencies understand conflict sensitivity.

The core values that link to our mandates, that appear to shape our interpretations of conflict sensitivity are:

The preservation of life – rooted in the humanitarian imperative. Operating in a conflict context has presented many humanitarians with a dilemma that they may provide life sustaining support, only to witness those sustained being killed by belligerents.

Social justice – rooted in rights based approaches to development. Development efforts that do not address the underlying causes of poverty, notably the structural injustices such as discrimination and failure to fulfil rights of citizens, tend to simply maintain the status quo.

Positive peace – rooted in peacebuilding approaches.

*Expertise*
Depending on organisational mandate and goals, each agency will have developed or recruited particular expertise, and will have in-house programmes to develop capacity and learning on particular issues or ways of working.

*Resources*
Resources include staff expertise (as above), but also the number of staff available, how much time they spend on particular types of work, the offices or other assets available to an organisation (vehicles, computers, communications equipment etc) and the funding they have available to deliver activities.

*Ways of working*
Organisations also have particular ways in which they undertake their work: some will focus on research and policy development, others on delivery of activities on the ground. They could work alone or through a variety of different types of partnerships, including one-off collaboration, institutional capacity-building arrangements, service delivery arrangements etc. They could work based in one place or through a range of field offices. They could have an explicit aim of working with authorities – or not – or with other actors like civil society, media, private sector and donor agencies.

*Areas of influence*
Depending on the focus of their work and who they have access to, organisations will have certain added value in terms of influencing change. Some work at the local level and could therefore greatly impact on change in grass-roots communities. Others link different levels, e.g. giving voice to local communities to influence district and national level government policies and decisions. Others may have the strongest influence on international policy-making and decisions.

Position 1 will itself involve organisations gaining a heightened awareness of conflict. This heightened awareness of conflict may lead some agencies to move to the position outlined in definition 2, adding explicit objectives related to conflict and where necessary changing their priorities/mandates to focus more specifically on peacebuilding. However, the Consortium also recognises that some agencies may wish to remain at the position corresponding to definition 1 for a variety of reasons (mandate, skill set, capacity etc). We acknowledge that alternative mandates are appropriate and not all agencies will, should or can explicitly focus on peacebuilding.

## Part 5: Suggested consortium working definition

### 5.1 Suggested consortium definition of CSA:

Given our acknowledgement that not every agency can or should progress from position one to position two, we are left with a dilemma – should conflict sensitivity only be applicable to those agencies who aiming for position two – an explicit prioritisation of reducing violent conflict?

Given our acknowledgement that differing mandates and priorities are appropriate, we decided that it would be inappropriate (and ineffective) to limit conflict sensitivity to only those agencies aiming for position two. Instead, we realised that position one would be the most effective definition of conflict sensitivity.

Therefore for the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, the definition most appropriate for defining conflict sensitivity is definition 1:

**A conflict sensitive approach involves gaining a sound understanding of the two-way interaction between activities and context[38] and acting to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of interventions on conflict, within an organisation's given priorities/objectives (mandate).**

### 5.2 Application and Scope of CSA

Drawing from section 3.3 above, we can also say that our definition of CSA

1. Applies to all contexts, regardless of the severity or frequency of violence, even in situations where underlying tensions have not recently resulted in violence.

2. Applies across and throughout all areas of our work and should be applied as an institutional approach (beyond tools)

3. 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.

4. Does not require changing mandates/priorities/objectives, and does not entail an explicit commitment to peacebuilding as a priority (can be mainstreamed across any priority / mandate)

It is also noted that the enhanced understanding of conflict that stems from conflict sensitivity, may lead some agencies to explicitly adopt peace-building priorities/activities. This may be considered a peace-building side-effect of adopting a conflict sensitive approach.

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[38] through conflict analysis

## Part 6: Potential Areas for Further Consortium Analysis

**Integrating CSA with other cross-cutting or mainstreamed approaches**
In order to effectively mainstream CSA, it will be important to integrate it with other organisational initiatives.

This will be important for several reasons:
- To avoid 'mainstreaming fatigue' it will be important to integrate CSA with any other new mainstreaming initiatives
- For the sake of efficiency, it will be more effective to integrate CSA into other approaches
- To gain more supporters of CSA mainstreaming (through integration with other initiatives, that may be more significantly resourced), more people will be actively involved in promoting CSA mainstreaming from the start

Each agency will need to consider which other key initiatives CSA needs to be integrated with in order for CSA mainstreaming to be successful. These initiatives may include:

- RBA – Right Based Approaches
- DRR Mainstreaming – Mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction
- Sphere – Initiatives to promote minimum standards in humanitarian response

Integration with other initiatives alone will almost certainly be insufficient for effective CSA mainstreaming. However, such should certainly be proactively sought in order to maximise efficiency.

**Policy Areas and Conflict Sensitivity**
We may also like to investigate how conflict sensitivity relates with policy areas including:

- Fragile states
- Aid effectiveness
- Protection
- State Building

**Humanitarian Aid and Conflict Sensitivity**
Another key area for further analysis will be to consider in greater depth how conflict sensitivity is perceived by the humanitarian aid community. We may like to investigate actual or perceived challenges (exploring different definitions of 'neutrality' and 'conditionality') and explore steps that can be taken to effectively mainstream conflict sensitivity into humanitarian aid. The Consortium will explore these issues further as we embark on the emergency pilot project.