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CONFLICT SENSITIVITY INTEGRATION REVIEW

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CONFLICT SENSITIVITY INTEGRATION REVIEW

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Fragility and Conflict Technical Research Services

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Introduction – USAID’s Rationale to Commission This Document

This document is part of a wider endeavor capturing evidence and developing guidance for USAID on how best to strengthen the integration of conflict sensitivity within USAID’s planning and programming cycle. The document has been developed as part of FACTRS – Fragility and Conflict Technical and Research Services. The objective of FACTRS is to support strategic technical research and learning for the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation in USAID’s Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA/CMM) to ensure that USAID policies and programs on fragility, conflict, and violence reflect the highest quality, evidence-based research and analysis. FACTRS is a three-year task order (2014-2017), and a collaboration between USAID, Management Systems International and CDA Collaborative Learning Projects.

The first year of FACTRS focused on conflict-sensitivity in food assistance. During year 2, FACTRS has focused on several complementary work streams: (i) Targeted review of Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) development and implementation; (ii) Completion of two case studies (Colombia and Liberia) focused on assessing the integration of conflict-sensitive approaches and practices throughout the USAID planning and program cycle, and (iii) a review of conflict-sensitivity policies and practices at the strategic and portfolio levels of various donors and implementing agencies (this document). The combined insights from these work streams are intended to inform technical guidance on integrating conflict-sensitive practices into strategy development and implementation

At the moment, USAID engages with conflict-sensitivity at different levels:

- Urgent Mission Response: In country contexts where there is high level demand and urgency for conflict-sensitive engagement as well as direct conflict programming, resulting in concrete commitments such as in the case of South Sudan where a USAID Mission Order explicitly details the Missions commitments and expectations with regards to conflict sensitivity;
- Legacy of Conflict programming: Missions that have been working in and on conflict for a long time (such as Colombia), where staff is acutely aware of interactions between the conflict context and USAID’s engagement; and
- Specific Technical Support: Technical leadership provided by CMM on conflict-sensitive approaches provided to USAID’s Regional Bureaus and Missions through support such as training and conflict-sensitive portfolio reviews (e.g. Uganda).

USAID has various technical guidance documents that are being used in conflict-affected contexts, including USAID’s conflict assessment framework (CAF) or sector specific conflict guidance (e.g. water and conflict, land and conflict). While different USAID Missions and Bureaus engage with conflict-sensitivity to varying degrees, there is currently no consistent or streamlined approach to integrating conflict-sensitivity into USAID policy and planning processes across the Agency.

This document intends to provide a contribution to CMM and USAID Missions as they seek to learn from the experiences and practices from other donors and international agencies in relation to conflict-sensitivity. It is also intended to provide a foundation for further discussion within USAID as well as with select external partners.

Purpose of This Document

This review documents the policies and practices of a range of donors and implementing agencies with conflict sensitivity at the strategic and portfolio levels. The purpose of the review is to document the range of guidance, internal management and accountability mechanisms adopted by a select number of donors and implementing agencies, to inform the development of guidance, management and accountability mechanisms for USAID.

The review is being shared with a wider audience to enable other donors and implementing agencies to similarly draw on the findings, such that they too may identify new ideas to better integrate conflict sensitivity in their own work.

Interviews were conducted with twenty-four informants across donor and implementing agencies, with written follow up, to draw deeper insights from both headquarters and the field about the current state of play. A detailed review of policy and guidance was also conducted of these agencies. USAID was *not* included in the review, as the purpose of the review was not to compare agencies, or to compare USAID with other agencies, but to identify practices that could *inform* USAID in its effort to enhance practice in conflict sensitivity.

Donors and implementing agencies covered in this review and their abbreviations	
1	Department for International Development (DFID) – UK
2	Stabilization Unit (SU) – UK
3	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)
4	Global Affairs Canada (GAC, formerly CIDA)
5	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer International Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) – Germany
6	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
7	Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
8	World Bank (WB)
9	European Union (EU)
10	UNDP
11	World Vision International (WVI)
12	CARE International
13	Catholic Relief Services (CRS)
14	Mercy Corps

This **synthesis document** pulls together the findings from across all agencies to identify the most prevalent and cutting edge approaches, what works best, and what lessons can be drawn for USAID in enhancing integration of conflict sensitivity. Promising practices have been attributed to specific agencies, while challenges to implementing conflict sensitivity have been anonymized.

Unit of analysis: This review considered policies and practices that aim to avoid unintentionally contributing to conflict, and to contribute to peace where possible. The agencies reviewed use a range of different terms for the concept of *conflict sensitivity*, thus documents and practices relating to avoiding unintentional harm, operating in situations of fragility, doing no harm etc. were included in the review. The review did not examine policies or practices relating to specific conflict management or peacebuilding programming.

Key Findings
Interest in conflict sensitivity
There is a resurgence of interest and activity on conflict sensitivity.
Policy commitments to conflict sensitivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many donors have a policy commitment to conflict sensitivity at both the strategy and program / project level, while implementing agencies tend to have policy commitments at the project level only. • A lack of a clear policy commitment to conflict sensitivity from the top does not need to be an obstacle to uptake, conversely a strong commitment to conflict sensitivity at the top doesn't always translate into more conflict-sensitive practice.
Guidance for conflict sensitivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a trend towards light touch guidance for conflict sensitivity, although some detailed guidance does remain in place. • One donor felt that guidance was not the best entry point for discussing conflict sensitivity at the strategy development level. • Donor guidance is increasingly emphasizing the importance of inter-departmental consensus on macro conflict analysis that informs country strategy development • Minimum standards for conflict sensitivity are popular, particularly among implementing agencies. • Filtering is used in a small number of guides in order to reduce the scope of application by prioritizing where conflict sensitivity effort is most needed. • Scoring for conflict sensitivity in project / program proposals was found in a small number of cases. • Donors and implementing agencies widely use the term 'Do No Harm' in guidance, but the methods proposed to assess possible harms are sometimes questionable.
Making the link between conflict analysis and country strategies / programs / projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having politically savvy individuals who can provide expertise and consistently advocate for conflict sensitivity was felt by two donors to be far more important than guidance in ensuring that conflict sensitivity is integrated into country strategies. Some agencies have systems for reviewing draft country strategies from a conflict sensitivity 'quality assurance' perspective. • Three donors and one implementing agency stated that conflict analysis is improving, but the link to programming remains weak. • Most approaches reviewed rely on questions to guide the process of linking analysis to strategies / programs / projects, and on drawing recommendations from the conflict analysis. • DFID and the EU are developing innovative funding mechanisms that enable conflict analysis – notably by embedding research budgets within larger programs.
Accountability mechanisms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring conflict sensitivity at the strategy level – perhaps the conflict sensitivity 'nirvana' we should aspire to -- was largely absent except for SDC and World Vision. • Monitoring for conflict sensitivity at project level is more widespread. • Assessments of conflict sensitivity tend to focus on process and not outcome.
Management mechanisms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No agency includes conflict sensitivity as a routine item in annual staff appraisals. • Responsibility for conflict sensitivity in most agencies is vague. • Electronic management systems / project databases have mixed results in being exploited for supporting conflict sensitivity in design phase.
Training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are four on-line training packages on conflict sensitivity being developed currently or recently completed, at least two of which are to be made available externally. • Conflict sensitivity usually comes up as a small item within trainings for staff conducted as part of annual retreats by donors. • Some agencies provide in-depth training on conflict sensitivity. • Opportunistic capacity building is being used - using opportunities for capacity building as they arise, not only through formal trainings.

Key Findings
Case studies
There is a very limited number of useful and reasonably recent case studies that document use, application, and uptake of conflict-sensitivity among donors and implementing agencies.
Conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several donors and implementing agencies are explicitly framing conflict sensitivity within a wider endeavor in which all interventions in conflict must demonstrate their contributions to peace. • There appear to be some assumptions that working on peacebuilding will automatically result in enhanced capacity in conflict sensitivity. • Two donors use language about ‘conflict sensitivity’ that much more strongly emphasizes the positive contribution to peace than the avoidance of unintended conflict-escalating impacts. • Several donors and implementing agencies have integrated guidance for both conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding.
Conflict sensitivity and risk management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict sensitivity has been integrated into risk assessment and management processes by some donors. • Integrating risk management and conflict sensitivity processes can undermine conflict sensitivity if there is confusion about the particularities and differences between risk management and conflict sensitivity.
Common challenges across agencies regarding the integration of conflict sensitivity into policies, strategies and programming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite the existence of policies and guidance, application is still patchwork. • Conflict sensitivity can become trapped in a technical, localized approach – small scale ‘fixes’ to major political decisions made at the strategic level. • Major incentive structures run counter to conflict sensitivity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The pressure to spend; - Centrally (e.g. HQ) driven targets which are not critical to a specific conflict context; - Previous programming and established relationships. • Application appears to be very dependent on the individuals involved. • Commitments are not backed up by compulsory processes. • Mandatory processes are not always enforced, making application dependent on the interests of senior management. • No donor or implementing agency has been able to demonstrate the benefits of conflict sensitivity by drawing on evidence. • Mainstreaming is reinventing the wheel, in that the same lessons are continually re-learned. • Several donors and implementing agencies assert that staff know Do No Harm or that a ‘do no harm principle’ influences everything they do, but do not back this up with guidance, training or assessments to determine actual staff capacity. • Guidance was found to be too long-winded or overly technical.

Key Findings

What works in promoting the uptake of conflict sensitivity?

- Getting conflict sensitivity integrated into country strategy development was strongly emphasized by a number of donors.
- Quality assurance reviews of country strategies from a conflict sensitivity perspective.
- Portfolio evaluations have provided a strong impetus for conflict sensitivity.
- Working collaboratively across Government departments.
- External pressure.
- Merit scoring in proposals.
- Ensuring conflict sensitivity is written into the program agreements with implementing partners.
- Mandatory application of conflict sensitivity.
- Providing un-earmarked funding to key implementing partners enabled the support of conflict sensitivity across a number of Country Offices.
- Senior management buy-in is key – both within the Country Office and at the top of the donor agency itself.
- But where no buy-in exists, link conflict sensitivity into other priority areas.
- Having specialist roles support countries in applying conflict sensitivity.
- The use of helpdesks is also supporting conflict sensitivity.
- Finding the right approach to engage with reticent sectors.
- Devolved decision making in which a strategy can adapt to a local context, rather than a strategy closely controlled from headquarters
- Larger portfolios have enabled a more holistic approach.
- Focusing human resources on Country Offices where there are a lot of new initiatives.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Interest in Conflict Sensitivity

There is a resurgence of interest and activity on conflict sensitivity: Conflict sensitivity was clearly and strongly on the agenda for a number of donors: the World Bank, the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the European Union (EU), the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), UK Stabilization Unit (SU). All had initiatives underway to understand and improve practice in conflict sensitivity, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) has done so in the recent past, and Global Affairs Canada (GAC) plans to in the future. The example of the World Bank was stark – from approximately five Fragility Assessments per year there are now thirteen. Among implementing agencies, a clear rejuvenation of interest in conflict sensitivity was apparent in Mercy Corps while the on-going mainstreaming and roll-out of conflict sensitivity continued in GIZ and World Vision.

2. Policy Commitments to Conflict Sensitivity

Many donors have a policy commitment to conflict sensitivity at both the strategy and program / project level, while implementing agencies tend to have policy commitments at the project level only. For some donors the commitment is framed in other language, not conflict sensitivity. The Fragile States Principles¹ have been a useful hook at this level.

A lack of a clear policy commitment to conflict sensitivity from the top does not need to be an obstacle to uptake. For example:

- For the EU, conflict sensitivity was introduced under the wing of conflict prevention, with significant uptake, and did not get formally articulated as ‘conflict sensitivity’ until 2011;
- Similarly, for UNDP, conflict sensitivity does not appear to ever have been articulated as a policy commitment, but wider commitments to conflict prevention have been interpreted to include conflict sensitivity, and in practice the commitment to conflict sensitivity is widely accepted;
- For CARE, CRS and World Vision, a lack of policy commitment at headquarters has left Country Offices to vote with their feet – Country Offices have made commitments to conflict sensitivity within the Country Office strategies, although this is clearly dependent on the interest of the senior management within Country Offices. In World Vision in particular this Country Office-led uptake has strongly taken root resulting in significant organizational change;
- For Mercy Corps, Country Office sectoral programs have stepped into the policy gap to make commitments to conflict sensitivity for specific sectors.

Conversely a strong commitment to conflict sensitivity at the top doesn’t always translate into practice. For example:

- For one donor there was a strong and recent commitment to conflict sensitivity from Government, but this was not articulated into policy and so remains somewhat vague. Coupled

¹ The Fragile States Principles (FSPs) provide a set of guidelines for actors involved in development peacebuilding and statebuilding in conflict contexts and were formally adopted by OECD Ministers in 2007. They include a specific principle to ‘do no harm’ and further ‘to take context as starting point’ -strong commitments to conflict sensitivity. The FSPs are widely felt to have been superseded by the subsequent New Deal on Engagement in Fragile States, adopted 2011.

with a lack of guidance on implementing this new commitment and a lack of integration into systems, conflict sensitivity – which was meant to be mandatory -- has ended up as somewhat optional.

- For another donor a commitment to ‘do no harm’ in recent policy was not backed up by guidance or training, thus in practice the result is ‘do no harm’ as a principle that may not be properly understood and remains somewhat inactive at the back of people’s minds.

3. Guidance for Conflict Sensitivity

3.1. Structure and Remit of Guidance

There is a trend towards light touch guidance for conflict sensitivity. SDC has taken a definite step *away* from detailed guidance, instead providing principles for conflict sensitivity and a number of short ‘How to’ Notes, which replace the earlier detailed methodology. DFID has generally shifted away from detailed guidance into the ‘Smart Rules’² which provide a clear framework for programming, setting out *all* compulsory processes to help clarify and reduce processes. CARE has developed a very simplified phased emergency response guidance that breaks conflict sensitivity into manageable chunks without overwhelming the reader with details. The SU has developed light touch guidance that synthesizes and streamlines other best practices guidance in this area with an emphasis on checklists and tip sheets. SIDA is reviewing guidance with a view to simplify it.

Although some detailed guidance does remain in place. Guidance for conflict sensitivity by BMZ/GIZ, UNDP and the World Bank’s Post-Conflict Needs Assessment (PCNA) is very detailed – two of these run over 100 pages. Recent reflections from the field by two of these agencies highlighted that guidance was felt to be complicated and lengthy. The EU has recently produced an extensive handbook on Operating in Situations of Conflict and Fragility. The handbook covers conflict sensitivity as well as relevant sectors such as governance and human rights. Interestingly this handbook steers away from the more conventional approach of a detailed technical ‘how-to’ guidance on conflict analysis and sensitivity, instead capturing for example:

- Explanation of the EU policy commitments that staff should be applying;
- Synthesis of lessons learned, in particular from evaluations of EU programming;
- Explanation of funding instruments available to conflict / fragile contexts;
- Flexible programming and procedures etc.

In general, the EU has deliberately avoided developing detailed guidance for the application of conflict sensitivity, instead providing a broad direction of travel and then supporting in application.

One donor felt that guidance was not the best entry point for discussing conflict sensitivity at the strategy development level. Naming issues as ‘conflict sensitive’ was felt to shift them into a technical approach, which would inhibit discussion and result in the more sensitive politicized issues being discussed elsewhere. For instance, cross-government discussions involving development, diplomatic and military actors to make strategic decisions on trade-offs between an elite bargain to create short-run stability vs a longer term ambition for an inclusive political settlement involve critical conflict sensitivity concerns which are highly political. However, naming these issues as ‘conflict sensitive’ and providing

² Which cover all aspects of programming (and are not specific to conflict sensitivity).

guidance was anticipated to close down the discussion as the forum would be seen as a place for technical matters and thus unrelated to the strategic issues at hand. This higher level political thinking / discussion was thus left without any conflict sensitivity guidance. However, other donors did not share this perspective – and some have guidance specifically at this level.

Donor guidance is increasingly emphasizing the importance of inter-departmental consensus on macro conflict analysis that informs country level strategy – this can be observed for DFID / SU, EU, UN and the World Bank’s PCNA. There is a strong emphasis on process rather than content for some, i.e. ensuring agreement on high level analysis rather than delving into great depth – thus in the trade-off between depth of shared analysis and consensus, the balance is tipping towards consensus. For some donors the diplomatic and aid departments have been merged which obviates the need for this.

3.2. Components of Guidance

Minimum standards for conflict sensitivity are popular, particularly among implementing agencies – GIZ, CRS, Mercy Corps, World Vision and CARE (Emergencies) all have defined minimum standards for conflict sensitivity. This builds on a wider sector shift most clearly articulated in the INEE (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies) minimum standards for education in conflict. However not all these minimum standards are enforced.

Filtering is used in a small number of guides in order to reduce the scope of application. BMZ / GIZ uses filtering at two tiers – the first involves an early warning system (determining for which countries conflict sensitivity is mandatory) and the second to determine the relevance of the project to conflict (i.e. from conflict sensitive to conflict transformative). SIDA uses three tiers for describing working in/on conflict, and the lowest tier – risk awareness – requires only an understanding of how conflict could affect development (i.e. not full conflict sensitivity). Interestingly SDC, which previously used tiers to determine depth of application of conflict sensitivity in the earlier version of Conflict Sensitive Programme Management (CSPM), has abandoned the tiered approach, instead using the approach of ‘relevant contribution’ to peace. Conversely the World Bank is expanding its definition of fragility which will expand application of conflict sensitivity.

Scoring for conflict sensitivity in project / program proposals was found in a small number of cases – both Netherlands MFA and GAC included compulsory sections in recent calls for proposals on how conflict sensitivity has been integrated with points allocated. However even with this compulsory element one donor found that proposals were still vague on conflict sensitivity and additional engagement was required to help make conflict sensitivity more specific.

Donors and implementing agencies widely use the term ‘Do No Harm’ in guidance, but the methods proposed to assess possible harms are sometimes questionable. Often it is not clear whether CDA’s Do No Harm framework³ is being referred to, or a general principle of doing no harm. For example, guidance from one donor included conducting a ‘Do No Harm’ assessment, yet the steps presented were a significantly truncated version of the Do No Harm framework, and key components of the framework were missing – it did not include analysis of resource transfers and implicit ethical messages, nor did it analyze the details of an aid project (where the intervention takes place, what is done how, key counterparts and beneficiaries etc.). Deleting key elements such as these ultimately undermines the Do No Harm framework – indeed CDA’s Do No Harm Framework was built on several key observations of

³ CDA Collaborative Learning Projects developed the Do No Harm (DNH) framework in the 1990ies. It is a framework for analyzing the impacts of international assistance on conflict—and for taking action to reduce negative impacts and maximize positive impacts. The “Do No Harm Framework” was developed based on an analysis of a variety of experiences of people and programs in the field. The foundational publication of CDA on the DNH framework and its use is “Do No Harm: How Aid Can Contribute to Peace—or War” by Mary B. Anderson (1999). Since then, CDA has been further refining its learning in relation to conflict-sensitivity and DNH, through additional collaborative learning processes and practical learning with organizations through accompaniment and advisory services.

aid in conflict, which relate very specifically to these deleted steps in the Framework. Another presentation of a methodology to assess a project for ‘Do No Harm’ by another agency was very different from the Do No Harm Framework although probably had a reasonably strong methodology for analyzing interaction. A third presentation of Do No Harm by an implementing agency required just one hour to apply it. Such a short analysis runs the risk of producing a superficial analysis.

Clearly the language of ‘doing no harm’ is widely taken up, but the methods proposed in some of the guidance may not actually be adequate, potentially resulting in people thinking they are applying Do No Harm, using the language of Do No Harm, but may not have done a good enough analysis of possible interactions with conflict – a kind of ‘Do No Harm-lite’. And in some cases the term is used to mean something else entirely – for one donor the term ‘do no harm’ is used to mean ensuring no rights are infringed.

LESSON/INSIGHTS FOR USAID ON GUIDANCE

Light touch guidance, potentially involving several short ‘How to’ Notes for specific development sectors, can increase receptiveness to guidance;

There is useful ‘guidance’ to provide that is not in the form of ‘how to’ – including a synthesis of lessons learned, relevant policy architecture and how funding mechanisms can enable conflict sensitivity;

Ensuring conflict sensitivity considerations feature in country-level strategy development requires careful consideration – guidance may not be the best tactic if it is marginalized as ‘technical;’

Building consensus among different government departments on macro conflict analysis that informs country strategies is becoming increasingly valued. However, there are trade-offs between ensuring consensus across departments and depth of analysis;

Filtering and minimum standards offer some utility in guidance at both the country strategy and program/project level;

Scoring for conflict sensitivity in proposals can be useful at the project level and shifts the onus more directly to the implementing partners;

Be explicit about what is meant with the term ‘Do No Harm’ and its application in practice.

4. Making the Link Between Analysis and Country Strategies / Programs / Projects

Having politically savvy individuals who can provide expertise and consistently advocate for conflict sensitivity (conflict-sensitivity “champions”) was felt by two donors to be far more important than guidance in ensuring conflict sensitivity is integrated into country strategies.

In particular, when country strategies are being developed and many different forms of analysis are on the table, it is down to the individuals in the room to keep focus on conflict sensitivity, not down to guidance. However, training provision generally tends to be pitched at introductory and refresher sessions, which may not be well matched to the capacities required of individuals to ensure conflict sensitivity in the absence of guidance at the strategy level.

Some agencies have systems for reviewing draft country strategies from a conflict sensitivity ‘quality assurance’ perspective – for example DFID, Dutch MFA, the World Bank and SDC. In Mercy

Corps ad hoc requests are received on this. For those without this mechanism this appears to be a missed opportunity and a relatively easy quick win for enabling conflict sensitivity.

Three donors and one implementing agency stated that conflict analysis is improving, but the link to programming remains weak. The pressure to spend was cited several times as a major problem here, as well as the replication of programming between different contexts (without adequate grounding in context) and other incentives that override programming considerations such as politically driven targets that are not linked to the real needs on the ground.

Most approaches reviewed rely on questions to guide the process of linking analysis to strategies / programs / projects, and on drawing recommendations from the conflict analysis. There is some considerable guidance on making the link developed by BMZ/GIZ, the EU, World Bank in the PCNA and SDC.

DFID and the EU are developing an innovative funding mechanism that enables conflict analysis – notably by embedding research budgets within larger programs. These are not exclusively for conflict analysis, but can be, and are intentionally to be used to design interventions funded through the mechanism. Rather than establishing free-standing conflict analysis funding these are embedded, and potentially allow for frequent updating of conflict analysis.

LESSONS/INSIGHTS FOR USAID ON MAKING THE LINK BETWEEN CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND COUNTRY STRATEGIES / PROGRAMS / PROJECTS

While guidance is important, having individuals who can pull together the key threads of analysis during country strategy development is critical, and these individuals need adequate capacity building to achieve this;

Reviewing draft country strategies from a conflict sensitivity perspective appears to be a relatively achievable yet important component of guidance;

Incorporating funding for conflict analysis within larger programs is a new best practice that could be adopted.

5. Accountability Mechanisms

Monitoring conflict sensitivity at the strategy level – perhaps the conflict sensitivity ‘nirvana’ we should aspire to – was largely absent except for SDC and World Vision who are clearly ahead in terms of systematic monitoring. For example, for SDC, each Country Office provides an annual report – known as a ‘Statement of Impact’ - on the implementation of the country strategy, which considers outcomes at this level. Given that the country strategies are designed as pathways out of fragility, this portfolio-wide statement must report on the impact of programs and interventions on conflict causes using a log frame at the country strategy level. Major findings are compiled per country by the Conflict and Human Rights Unit at headquarters on the contribution of the portfolio as a whole to peacebuilding and statebuilding, and this includes identifying if/how the portfolio is adapting to the conflict etc. This forms part of the overall Ministerial report.

In South Sudan the SDC Country Office has chosen to use a scenario oriented problem tree for monitoring at the strategy level, and the ‘fields of observation’⁴ they report against will help clarify which scenario is emerging. Indicators are developed for each scenario, and then the Country Office assesses

⁴ Such as the monopoly of violence.

what this means for projects and the strategy overall. Monthly dialogues are held with implementing partners on conflict sensitivity, along with other relevant sectoral areas (such as health) within the framework of 'pathways out of fragility'. Significant revisions to plans (even total re-writes) are acceptable; a project should evolve in line with the context.

World Vision includes a process audit on conflict sensitivity within annual reviews – if the conflict analysis is up to date and fulfils certain performance requirements. BMZ and the World Bank have also committed to monitor conflict sensitivity at the strategy level but have not yet done so, but it is possibly the next great step. Many donors thought this was an ambitious but feasible target to work towards.

Monitoring for conflict sensitivity at project level is more widespread – for instance BMZ / GIZ, DFID, Dutch MFA all noted that project level conflict sensitivity monitoring occurs or that this was currently being ramped up, while recent EU guidance proposes such monitoring. For example, for BMZ / GIZ, project level monitoring involves:

- a checklist for assessing the possible areas where a project might impact on the conflict (such as increasing tensions or promoting the economy of violence);
- a series of questions to reflect on the specifics of the project and how these might interact with conflict, and;
- the formulation of hypothesis of possible unintended impacts which are then developed into questions for on-going impact monitoring.

For SDC, monitoring conflict sensitivity is more informal, given their small number of implementing partners. For CRS light conflict monitoring is expected, and Mercy Corps is exploring the possibility of a standard indicator for conflict sensitivity.

Assessments of conflict sensitivity tend to focus on process and not outcome, as it is generally easier to ask people if they have undertaken specific processes (and sometimes to assess the quality of those processes) than to ask them to evaluate the impact of their interventions on conflict.

For one donor, a portfolio review in a specific country from a conflict sensitivity perspective was initially designed and budgeted to examine outcomes on the conflict context. However, this was felt to be too judgmental among staff and so had to be scaled back in ambition and budget, so as to assess processes for enabling conflict sensitivity only.

One donor had a common indicator at the strategy level - number of interventions based on a 'good enough' conflict analysis⁵ - but this was felt to be flawed not only for its process focus, but also that it gave no insights on the quality of the process monitored.

Interestingly this avoidance of examining outcomes strongly contradicts wider trends in the fields of development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding, which are ever more enthusiastically seeking ways to measure and demonstrate impact.

⁵ Donors and agencies have their own definitions of what a 'good enough conflict analysis' looks like, but the term is meant to cover a conflict analysis scope and process that serves the particular purposes of the donor or agency by focusing on the key drivers of the conflict at the level at which the analysis is deemed to be most useful (e.g. national or a specific region, or sector specific analysis). The idea of the term 'good enough' is usually to steer people away from excessive analysis, but also to recognize that what is 'good enough' can change over time.

LESSONS/INSIGHTS FOR USAID ON ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Monitoring conflict sensitivity outcomes at the country strategy level is the next great leap forward and has been proven to be possible by a donor. If USAID wishes to establish cutting edge conflict sensitive practice it should form a key component of USAID guidance and policy;

Monitoring conflict sensitivity should not be process monitoring (audits) only, but should also include outcome monitoring – perhaps similar to ‘Statements of Impact’ (above) or using sector or geographic ‘principles for conflict sensitivity’ or contextualized questions sets. For example, for security sector reform programming two sample principles could be:

- Ensure the unification of the security services does not create structures organized along ethnic lines*
- Ensure accountability and oversight is given equal weight to capability in security sector reform (SSR) programming*

Monitoring would then take the form of adherence to such principles. Alternatively, these could be phrased as contextualized questions sets, and monitoring would then involve repeat discussions of the same questions at regular intervals, potentially using a scale to rate findings, for example:

- Has SSR programming and policy dialogue contributed to the ‘ethnisation’ of security services?*
- Has SSR programming and policy addressed accountability and oversight?*

Other forms of monitoring beyond indicators will be useful here.

6. Management Mechanisms

No agency includes conflict sensitivity as a routine item in annual staff appraisals, although most would capture it in an ad hoc way if specific issues had arisen in an individual’s work. This would probably not be named as conflict sensitivity.

Responsibility for conflict sensitivity in most agencies is vague – unless there is a conflict advisor in a country office, the responsibility tends to sit with a small thematic team in HQ who have no line management responsibility and have a global remit. Conflict advisors in these roles across both donors and implementing agencies have found their influence seriously limited by these constraints.

Electronic management systems have mixed results in being exploited for supporting conflict sensitivity in the design phase. For one donor, the electronic management system has a specific data entry field in project appraisal stage that asks the user to state whether conflict sensitivity is a relevant consideration. If the user identifies conflict sensitivity as relevant this then triggers the analysis of conflict sensitivity risks as part of subsequent risk assessment and management processes. However, many projects for which conflict sensitivity was relevant were not identified as such – the user did not have to justify their decision of relevance, the system did not have any checks on this. This system flaw could be rectified if staff were obliged to justify why conflict sensitivity *wasn’t relevant*, as this should push staff into recognizing relevance. However, even with this adjustment, questions were raised as to the efficacy of processing conflict sensitivity concerns through risk assessment and management processes. In another implementing agency the project database has a specific check that projects over a certain value had conducted a conflict analysis.

LESSONS/INSIGHTS FOR USAID ON MANAGEMENT MECHANISMS

Responsibility for conflict sensitivity needs to sit within Missions, and with specific named roles;

Electronic management systems at project appraisal stage can be helpful to trigger conflict sensitivity processes but require thoughtful design.

7. Training

There are 4 on-line training packages on conflict sensitivity being developed currently or recently completed, at least two of which are to be made available externally which USAID could access—from the EU and UNDP.

Conflict sensitivity usually comes up as a small item within trainings for staff conducted as part of annual retreats by donors. It is often only an hour or so, so is more of an introduction to the concept than an actual ‘training’.

Some agencies provide in-depth training on conflict sensitivity – BMZ/GIZ provide bespoke 1:1 training /briefings to newly deploying staff to FCAS including a full day to explain the Peace and Conflict Assessment process and findings, and specific training on conflict sensitivity. External country experts may be brought in for these. The SU is undertaking training that customizes conflict sensitivity to the Conflict Stability and Security Fund, as well as other trainings across DFID. Mercy Corps has begun a training roll out in DNH, while WV has a significant training function for conflict sensitivity.

Opportunistic capacity building is being used - SIDA and Mercy Corps are tagging an additional day of capacity building on conflict sensitivity to trips for other purposes.

LESSONS/INSIGHTS FOR USAID ON TRAINING

Existing on-line training could be utilized for a wide reach of introductory-type training on conflict sensitivity;

Conducting trainings combining multiple missions may have limited utility and is likely to be tightly squeezed for time. A better approach may be to work more intensively with Country Missions as they grapple to apply it to their own strategy and portfolio.

8. Case Studies

There is a very limited number of useful and reasonably recent case studies that document how different agencies have applied conflict-sensitivity in practice. Some donors are reluctant to document case studies given political sensitivities. However, the UNDP interviewee expressed a keen interest to capture case studies and would welcome collaboration on this.

9. Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding

Several donors and implementing agencies are explicitly framing conflict sensitivity within a wider endeavor in which all interventions in conflict must demonstrate their contributions to peace. This perspective does not mean that all interventions have to be peacebuilding interventions, but that even development interventions must show how they contribute to peace. SDC is using the term ‘relevant contribution’ as part of this shift: “SDC is making a relevant contribution to the improvement of the

*living conditions, the reduction of causes of conflicts and the increase of the crisis resistance in selected fragile contexts, in order to help concerned states to more effectively overcome internal and external crises.”*⁶ Thus SDC has reframed the entire objective of working in FCAS as supporting pathways out of fragility, making peace the issue rather than underdevelopment. SIDA’s new Government Directive states that all aid should be permeated by a ‘conflict perspective’ which means they should take opportunities to contribute to conflict prevention, mitigation, transformation, peacebuilding or state building. This position has been stated for DFID for some time, but it is only recently that it is taking root. And since 2001, conflict sensitivity has been introduced in the EU under the banner of conflict prevention.

Among implementing agencies CRS similarly frames conflict sensitivity in relation to peacebuilding, and specifically that it is the minimum requirement where peacebuilding cannot be integrated. CRS has put a lot of effort into distinguishing between conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding.

There appear to be some assumptions that working on peacebuilding will automatically result in enhanced capacity in conflict sensitivity (or that a conscious approach to conflict-sensitivity is necessarily an entry point for peacebuilding). In one agency, for instance, there is a strong focus on peacebuilding, and no training or guidance on conflict sensitivity, nor any checks on its application, yet it was felt that staff know and are using Do No Harm. There was perhaps an implicit assumption that understanding of conflict sensitivity will happen by osmosis for those engaged in peacebuilding. For another agency a new organizational direction to build a portfolio and profile in the peacebuilding sector ‘sucked all the air out of the room’, and resulted in a loss of focus on conflict sensitivity despite a continued organizational commitment to it. Staff resources, which had hitherto supported conflict sensitivity were redirected to peacebuilding.

Two donors use language regarding ‘conflict sensitivity’ that much more strongly emphasizes the positive contribution to peace than the avoidance of unintended conflict escalating impacts. For one donor the term ‘conflict sensitivity’ appears to be used to cover not only doing no harm, but also to refer to interventions with a direct peace objective – usually referred to as conflict prevention, peacebuilding etc., and their guidance documents often use the term ‘conflict sensitivity’ but *only* discuss the positive contribution to peace of an intervention. For another donor the language of conflict sensitivity is used in policy goals, but the policy paper only discusses positive contributions to peace. Avoiding contributing to conflict is recognized elsewhere - under operational principles – but not under ‘conflict sensitivity’. Possibly these are examples of a growing normative agenda of how development can contribute to security in the west, in which development is framed as the solution rather than as part of the problem.

Several agencies have integrated guidance for both conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding – such as UNDP, World Bank and SDC.

⁶ *How to Note: Relevant Contribution in Fragile Contexts* (2013) p.1

LESSONS/INSIGHTS FOR USAID ON CONFLICT SENSITIVITY AND PEACEBUILDING

There is some confusion between conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding, which can result in a loss of focus on conflict sensitivity since the 'positive contribution to peace' dimension becomes more emphasized. This can play out in organizational direction and staff resourcing. Combining guidance for conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding can feed this problem;

While there is obvious overlap between conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding, and discussions around one can serve as entry points for the other, it is critical to be clear about the purposes, pre-conditions, and benefits of each approach. While all development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding interventions need to be conflict-sensitive, not every initiative will address key drivers of conflict directly and hence contribute to peacebuilding & work on conflict directly.

Working on peacebuilding does not automatically result in conflict sensitive programming. It is critical that this insight informs the design of guidance – specific to conflict-sensitivity and peacebuilding / work on conflict.

10. Conflict Sensitivity and Risk Management

Conflict sensitivity has been integrated into risk assessment and management processes by some institutions to differing degrees. For BMZ / GIZ the integration is complete – the Peace and Conflict Assessment tool incorporates both identifying risks of the conflict affecting the intervention in step 3 of the Peace and Conflict Assessment tool, and risks of the unintended impacts of the intervention on the conflict are identified in step 4. Both draw on the same conflict analysis (step 1), and require on-going monitoring. SIDA has also integrated conflict sensitivity assessments within risk management processes at the project level. One donor asserted that risk management and conflict sensitivity had been integrated, however risks were defined one-way only (to include risks the context may create for the intervention, but to exclude risks the intervention may contribute to the conflict) so analysis and management processes do not adequately integrate the two.

Integrating risk management and conflict sensitivity can undermine conflict sensitivity. For one donor, integration was felt to be clumsy and did not adequately handle conflict sensitivity concerns as they are addressed too late and inadequately in the risk management mechanisms.

LESSONS/INSIGHTS FOR USAID ON CONFLICT SENSITIVITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

Integrating conflict sensitivity and risk management at the project level is feasible and can be efficient, but a conscious approach to how it's being done appropriately is required;

Ensure that risk is understood two ways – risks the context may create for the intervention, and risks the intervention may contribute to the conflict;

If combined, ensure that risk assessment is undertaken early enough to influence the design of the intervention;

Ensure that the risk assessment and management process is able to handle the difficulty of estimating impact and likelihood of conflict sensitivity risks.

II. Common Challenges across Agencies Regarding the Integration of Conflict Sensitivity into Policies, Strategies and Programming

Despite the existence of policies and guidance, application is still patchwork and this came out strongly in two major donor evaluations. Similarly, the portfolio reviews of another donor found likewise. The common challenges are described below.

Conflict sensitivity can become trapped in a technical, localized approach – small scale fixes to major political decisions made at the strategic level. For instance, ensuring that there is representation of all different ethnic groups in community committees rather than examining the political economy of development aid, and what the implications are of working in specific sectors or regions. This was noted among some donors and one major donor evaluation that found that a project-level focus to conflict sensitivity inhibited understanding of cross-portfolio issues. It was noted that conflict sensitivity is much more effective when it is applied at a more macro level and politically. One cutting edge development for conflict sensitivity is the effort to integrate it within strategy development, which directly addresses this challenge.

Major incentive structures run counter to conflict sensitivity:

- **The pressure to spend** was mentioned by both donors and implementers. This undermined project / program quality in general, and the need to take time for conflict analysis was easily overridden under time pressure. For donors in particular, spending to target is often a key criterion for staff promotions - and so is a very important incentive system;
- **Centrally-driven targets which are not critical to a specific conflict context** – these could be Ministerial/Departmental interests or political priorities for instance;
- **Previous programming and established relationships** can overly influence the design of new programming and this can affect the conflict sensitivity of the portfolio.

Application appears to be very dependent on the individuals involved. This came up in many of the agencies reviewed – both donors and implementing agencies. Notably in strategy development the value of technical guidance was questioned. Political, savvy individuals, who can both maintain the focus on the conflict sensitive issues as well as navigate the politics are key. Conflict sensitivity can become an inconvenient truth, a thorn in the side of processes that are ambitious and aspirational.

Further, long term staff can sometimes be less receptive to conflict sensitivity as they are already very confident in their own comprehension of the situation and are less willing to take a step back to gain another perspective. These staff may be more predisposed to continually seek to adapt existing plans rather than to recognize the context has shifted so significantly that a complete review and rethink on the portfolio is needed. Conversely staff who have worked in other conflict contexts may already be exposed to the concepts and so be more receptive.

Commitments are not backed up by compulsory processes. For one donor, a clear directive on conflict sensitivity meant that there is no longer a need to make the case for conflict sensitivity in terms of effectiveness – the instruction is clear. However, the systems do not reinforce conflict sensitivity: it is not mandatory to identify conflict sensitivity in project management systems nor report on it in annual strategy reports.

Mandatory processes are not always enforced, making application dependent on the interests of senior management. In some cases, senior management have *not* prioritized conflict

sensitivity, due to an overwhelming number of cross cutting themes / sheer volume of work, a lack of incentives, or a strong focus on other areas.

No donor or implementing agency has been able to systematically document the benefits of conflict sensitivity drawing on field-based evidence and/or organizational lessons and impacts. The desire to make the business case for conflict sensitivity has been longstanding, but no significant progress has been made in this area. One donor commented that compulsory processes are pointless if the business case is not made more strongly.

Mainstreaming is reinventing the wheel. The same problems that were identified 15 years ago as obstacles to conflict sensitivity are still being held up as lessons learned – for instance needing a lot of time to generate buy-in, that getting consultants to do conflict analysis results in no buy-in to the findings etc. These are not new lessons, but some agencies seemed to be only just ‘learning’ them. This was found to be the case even where agencies have deeply experienced conflict specialists who have been aware of these lessons for over a decade.

Several agencies assert that staff know Do No Harm or that a ‘do no harm principle’ influences everything they do, but do not back this up with guidance or training, or assessments to determine actual capacity. This was found across both donors and implementing agencies. Evaluation findings highlighted the unstructured, unsystematic, informal and intuitive application of conflict sensitivity.

Guidance was found to be too long-winded or overly technical in several donors, one of whom had dramatically reduced guidance as a result.

12. What Works in Promoting the Uptake of Conflict Sensitivity?

Getting conflict sensitivity integrated into country strategy development was strongly emphasized by a number of donors. Divergent views were expressed among donors on guidance, with most stating guidance was feasible, appropriate (some felt it was essential) at this level, and one view that guidance was not helpful at this level. In one donor, where guidance at this level is valued, headquarters are able to insist on components of the guidance being applied, and feasibly this could also be audited. There was wider consensus on the need for savvy individuals who can navigate the politics and maintain the focus on the key conflict sensitivity concerns. One donor felt that encouraging and supporting national staff to engage in and contribute proactively to strategic analysis and decisions was the most effective mechanism for integrating conflict sensitivity at the strategy level.

Quality assurance reviews of country strategies from a conflict sensitivity perspective was an important mechanism in integrating conflict sensitivity into country strategy development.

Portfolio evaluations have provided a strong impetus for conflict sensitivity in three donors. For example, in one donor the evaluation findings have been frequently cited in justifying strengthened conflict sensitive practice.

Working collaboratively across Government departments in particular to achieve a shared understanding of the conflict and recognize what the different policy areas bring to the conversation was highlighted by several donors. Notably in Country Offices, strong on-going collaboration in weekly joint political analysis was noted, not just a one-off exercise for a major analysis process. One donor called this a ‘permanent conversation’ on what is happening and why, and whether the portfolio and its context are on the right track. Another donor highlighted that making this collaboration compulsory with clear policy gave a strong impetus for joint working, but also that country level leadership was also key.

External pressure was cited by both donors and implementing agencies. Two donors highlighted how NGOs can create a strong impetus for conflict sensitivity among donors. External pressure can also come from outside the donor department of Government – notably when questions are asked in Parliament, or a Parliamentary directive is introduced. When something goes wrong in a specific country, e.g. a donor-funded project is highlighted in the media for being problematic, or where a situation suddenly and rapidly deteriorates such as South Sudan in 2013, can also create this external pressure.

Scoring for CS in proposals - Donor requirements were a strong – compulsory -- incentive noted by several implementing agencies (CMM's requirements in proposals was highlighted as a good example here, also noted were BMZ). Other donors have also used scoring in proposals for conflict sensitivity. One donor that didn't use scoring had returned proposals for revision including demanding greater evidence that an adequate conflict analysis had been conducted, or that the program demonstrate that conflict sensitivity risks had been considered. This created an increase in demand for cross-government conflict analysis. Reinforcing behavior is needed, with consequences for those who did not further enhance their conflict sensitivity. Two donors noted the use of program / project review processes with operational committee meetings being used to raise conflict sensitivity concerns.

Ensuring conflict sensitivity is written into the program agreements with implementing partners was also highlighted by donors as essential. The Risk Management Office in Nepal – a joint undertaking of DFID and GIZ, had insisted that implementing partners undertake regular conflict sensitivity assessments and provided a process to be used, along with human resources to facilitate the process.

Mandatory application of conflict sensitivity was highlighted by several donors and implementing agencies. For donors this generally took the form of filtering of countries (e.g. defining certain countries as fragile where conflict sensitivity must be applied to all interventions) but also to a lesser degree by filtering of projects (where projects are coded for depth of application). For implementing agencies mandatory application is achieved through minimum standards. Integrating conflict sensitivity checks into project management systems was also highlighted as a promising practice, which required careful set up to ensure process checks cannot be circumvented.

Providing non-project funding to key implementing partners enabled the support of conflict sensitivity across a number of Country offices. DFID's Programme Partnership Agreements were notable for this – where additional funding was provided to the major recipients of DFID project funding to allow these agencies to improve program quality in a range of pre-agreed areas. The detailed use of the funding was flexible – for instance it could be used for additional staff to support program quality, for training roll out, for ongoing learning, research etc. This approach would have been strengthened with stronger transition plans in place for the eventual withdrawal of this funding stream.

Senior management buy-in is key – both within the Country Office and at the top of the donor agency itself. One effort to demonstrate this buy-in at the EU has been to capture videos of heads of ECHO, EEAS etc. explaining how they see conflict sensitivity as important, and incorporate these into training packages to demonstrate the commitment of people at the top of the hierarchy. Within a country office the support of the country director is essential, in one example in the World Bank the Country Management Unit in Ukraine had made it a *requirement* that any new operations must apply the World Bank's Conflict Filter. Implementing agencies also gave numerous examples where country directors and senior management teams had made commitments to conflict sensitivity in their country strategies. It was noted for one implementing agency that the minimum standard alone is insufficient, and that relationship-building with key individuals is essential to ensure application of the minimum standard, and this takes a lot of time to slowly win them over.

Where conflict sensitivity is *not* a priority for senior management the best strategy has been to **link it into other priority areas**, making conflict sensitivity relevant to these areas to provide a back door for mainstreaming it. It can also be embedded in other processes, such as accountability mechanisms.

Having specialist roles support countries in applying conflict sensitivity was highlighted by both donors and implementing agencies alike. This works best when the advisor is located in country, but if this is not feasible, at minimum a post designated to support conflict sensitivity for that country should exist somewhere. Having a staff member to continuously engage the organizational politics of embedding conflict sensitivity was also noted as key and a very different role to the advisors supporting countries directly. One donor noted how technical specialists supporting stabilization programs in two countries had strongly collaborated with other program areas to promote and support conflict sensitivity, however this is not always the case. Major technical silos can also present enormous barriers to this.

The use of helpdesks is also supporting conflict sensitivity – SIDA currently has a helpdesk on human security, and previously DFID had a helpdesk covering conflict, crime and violence. Both have involved consortia of specialist agencies who provide fast turnaround tailored responses to requests coming in from Country Office staff and headquarters. The SIDA helpdesk requests have covered a range of topics relevant to conflict sensitivity such as conflict analysis and conflict-sensitivity assessments of specific country portfolios, portfolio and project reviews etc. The DFID helpdesk requests included a request to develop a quick ‘tool’ to assess the potential conflict sensitivity of new project proposals. The DFID helpdesk also developed specific guidance papers, including the monitoring and evaluation of conflict sensitivity.

Finding the right approach to engage with reticent sectors – Until recently, there has been a significant challenge found in implementing agencies when engaging the humanitarian sector, due to analysis processes being too slow for the high pace of a rapid-onset emergency response. There have now been significant successes with overcoming this - a number of implementing agencies now have widespread uptake in the humanitarian sector. Finding appropriate ‘tools’ has been important, as well as the common experience of the Syria response which has been long term and for which the conflict sensitivity concerns are stark.

Devolved decision making was noted by one particular donor. Where decision making is devolved the strategy can adapt when conflict sensitivity concerns are identified. For country offices where headquarters holds the strategy very tightly, making adjustments in light of conflict sensitivity is very cumbersome. For another donor, this related to the size of the budget – certain thresholds of budget mean that Ministerial sign off is required for changes to the program. This similarly hindered the flexibility required for conflict sensitivity.

Larger portfolios have enabled a more holistic approach with more funds being available for analysis, including a new promising practice of integrating a significant research component into the program itself.

Focusing human resources on Country Offices where there are a lot of new initiatives was highlighted by one donor as the most efficient way to promote conflict sensitivity.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This document synthesizes the findings from detailed institutional reviews across fourteen different donors and implementing agencies, examining conflict sensitive policy, guidance, management and accountability mechanisms, and actual practice. The best and promising practices and lessons for USAID (and indeed any other donor or agency wishing to enhance conflict sensitivity) are highlighted.

This 'external' look, combined with a USAID internal review of select USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategies as well as two case studies of how two USAID Missions have taken steps to integrate conflict-sensitivity at the Mission level are expected to provide CMM with a solid foundation to determine next steps towards enhanced engagement with conflict-sensitivity, including technical guidance.

U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20523