RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT:

A Note on Conflict Sensitivity from USAID's Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention (CVP)

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Humanitarian and development professionals operate in incredibly challenging and complex circumstances. Most countries in which USAID works exhibit a significant degree of fragility: roughly 20 percent are in acute crisis, 20 percent are either recovering from or prone to crisis, and 40 percent experience or are at risk of smaller-scale shocks and stresses such as communal violence and rampant crime. Even in comparatively peaceful countries, social contracts are increasingly breaking down and identity politics are on the rise. Corruption, competition over natural resources, climate change, and complex disasters exacerbate violence, instability, and conflict. Practitioners must therefore learn to program in ways that meet project goals without exacerbating problems and that, ideally, foster social cohesion, tolerance, and collaboration.

There is no such thing as a neutral intervention.

To deliver enduring development outcomes, not simply successful activities, USAID must ensure that all its programming—regardless of country context or development sector—builds connections and strengthens local capacities for peace. *The purpose of this guide is to highlight how practitioners improve development outcomes using a conflict-sensitive approach.* Even in times of peace, programs may achieve their intended objectives but inadvertently cause strife by benefiting one group over another or conferring goods or services in a manner that incites distrust or disputes. Conflict sensitivity ensures that donor inputs are better managed, mitigates violence and conflict, and advances peace and prosperity.

What is Conflict Sensitivity?

Conflict sensitivity is a practice and approach that focuses on understanding explicit and implicit context dynamics so that programmers are better able to adapt and respond to complex operating environments. Conflict sensitivity acknowledges that *even the best-intentioned development interventions can have negative impacts and exacerbate problems*.

Conflict sensitivity evolved from the essential humanitarian principle of Do No Harm, which recognizes that aid can cause harm but can also be used to strengthen local capacities for peace in communities affected by disaster and conflict. Although the use of the term "conflict" may lead to skepticism about this approach's relevance to all contexts, conflict is an inevitable and natural part of human interaction and occurs in every family, community, and country. Development and humanitarian professionals can and do incorporate conflict sensitivity during periods of stability and peace as well as of instability and conflict.

DO NO HARM

Consciously looks for and seeks to avoid or mitigate negative impacts on conflict dynamics (the context in which tensions exist in a given setting)—for example, unintentionally worsening divisions among identity groups or reinforcing structural or systemic marginalization.

CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

Builds on Do No Harm principles and consciously seeks to build societal connections, looking for opportunities that build peace and negate tensions or conflict.

It requires: *a)* an understanding of the context in which the intervention is working; *b)* recognizing how the intervention interacts with the context; and *c)* continually revisiting the programming approach to ensure that no harm is being done and that interventions have positive outcomes and contribute to peace.

USAID/CVP offers several resources for further understanding and applying conflict sensitivity: [1]

• Conflict Sensitive Aid (CSAid) Training, Advanced Conflict Assessment (ACA) Training

• Direct field support to USAID Missions

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1   For more information, contact cvpcomms@usaid.gov, or this contract's Contracting Officer Representative (COR), Tanya Alfredson.

Applying a Conflict Sensitive Approach

International development actors naturally focus on their specific sector objectives and may unintentionally neglect the interaction between their programs and the context. However, humanitarian and development professionals can use the following strategies to operationalize and mainstream conflict sensitivity.
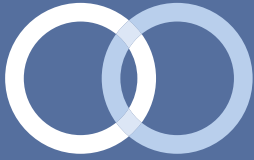
ASSESS THE INTERACTION OF CONFLICT DYNAMICS WITH USAID PROGRAMMING. Understanding the context and conflict dynamics in the operating environment directly impacts the extent of conflict-sensitive integration. Although it is ideal to have an assessment inform the initial design, conflict analyses can be conducted at any stage of the program cycle. A broad regional conflict assessment or several rapid community assessments are both applicable. Assessment questions may include the following: Are groups well served by the government? How do groups interact? How do these groups perceive their place in society? Is justice served? How or why not? What are the experiences of different identity groups? Are resources distributed evenly and are governments responsive? Application of findings around sociopolitical dynamics that mitigate conflict and violence and support peace is key to conflict mitigation and violence prevention.

MITIGATE RISK AND PREVENT CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE. The purpose of prevention is to interrupt the pathways to conflict and violence and foster peace and stability, essential components of sustainable development. Whether the focus be on citizen security, health, or agriculture, donors and implementers must model conflict-sensitive approaches that are proactive and leverage connections rather than simply react or respond to conflict or violence. Inclusion of stakeholders at all levels of society in design and implementation not only conveys donor respect, fairness, and transparency but also engenders trust, cooperation, and commitment to deepen understanding of the context through local perspectives. Consistent and participatory assessment and monitoring of the USAID program's interaction with local conflict dynamics can build social cohesion and advance community resilience.

USE COLLABORATING, LEARNING, AND ADAPTING (CLA) APPROACHES. CLA approaches underpin conflict-sensitive best practices and provide measured and informed steps to develop an adaptive response to evolving dynamics. When used appropriately, CLA approaches encourage broad engagement, pause-and-reflect exercises, community feedback, open learning forums, and scenario planning that instill greater responsiveness and agility in any context, particularly in complex and unpredictable contexts.

SET A PRECEDENT FOR PEACE: Donors, local partners, and implementers have a responsibility to promote sustainable peace. What does peace look like to the community? Who is responsible for it? And how is it achieved? With a conflict-sensitive approach, we engage, learn, and adapt to forecast opportunities for peace from the start rather than react to negative consequences. Efforts to predict and respond to potential impediments to peacebuilding objectives, even if they lie outside direct program objectives, set a precedent for peace.

Used together, these strategies empower USAID staff and partners to reconsider standard development and humanitarian approaches in a framework that mitigates the potential harm of interventions and maximizes opportunities for prosperous, healthy, and resilient populations in stable and peaceful communities. The table below provides examples of how a conflict-sensitive approach can differ from a traditional approach to a development challenge.

Conflict Sensitive Interventions

	TRADITIONAL DEVELOPMENT	CONFLICT SENSITIVE DEVELOPMENT
LIVELIHOODS FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH	A livelihoods activity seeks to improve agricultural opportunities for small and mid-size farmers. The program targets rural, impoverished populations, including former combatants of a civil war that took place 10 years ago. A *traditional development approach* would focus on increasing land and seed distribution, building capacities in new farming technology, and refurbishing local markets to sell excess products. *CHALLENGE: Midway through the activity, it is found that male former combatants are more agile at learning and implementing new technologies and are thus getting products to market at a faster pace than beneficiaries who had not engaged in violence. This perceived competition is renewing tensions among villages that had reluctantly reintegrated former combatants.*	A *conflict-sensitive approach* regularly engages the local community to understand how the activity impacts group dynamics and tensions and how these tensions may affect the ability to achieve the intervention objective. A conflict-sensitive approach considers behaviors and attitudes between non- and former combatants, how the conflict affected populations, possible repercussions of inclusion of former combatants (male and female), and who might feel intentionally excluded from the activity. *SOLUTION: Because this activity appears to threaten villagers' economic interests, identifying and addressing obstacles to achieving the same pace of learning and productivity are key. Additionally, efforts to address lingering distrust toward ex-combatants include inter- and intragroup activities to explore perceptions and attitudes. Conflict-sensitive approaches will build feelings of comity and collaboration and eventually ease tensions and help achieve the original development objective.*
WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)	WASH[2] for health and well-being emphasizes activities that contribute to the improved health of communities, such as domestic water supply, excreta disposal, hygiene education and sanitation promotion, water quality, household drainage, and community waste disposal. Water can be a target as well as a weapon of conflict, and in many development contexts, water and conflict are inextricably linked. [3] *CHALLENGE: Water drawing, transportation, storage, and use and cleanliness of public and private facilities are mostly women's responsibility. Most traditional development programs are designed to maximize benefits for women and engage them actively in the decision-making process. However, local conflict dynamics make it more dangerous for women to walk to water sources and hygiene service locations. Women are increasingly reporting rape and sexual assault incidents. Furthermore, more frequent droughts are increasing targeted assaults on women to deter depletion of the resource by one group. .*	A *conflict-sensitive approach* encourages local participation in decision-making processes at the program's inception and asks the following: Whom does the WASH program benefit and who is left out? What are the risks and benefits of each structure to community members living in and around each water source? What is the association between water and conflict, locally and regionally? Which sites serve as cultural or social gathering places for men and for women? *SOLUTION: Ensure a fair mapping of water resource locations and nearby populations. Prioritize long-term community cohesion in the design with women and men from all community/ethnic groups participating in finding solutions. Understand the drivers of conflict and how those relate to WASH as well as the effects of conflict on WASH programming. Increase monitoring and security of WASH sites until women, girls, and the community collaboratively identify safety measures. In addition, identify psychosocial trauma support for assaulted women and link this activity to USAID's area justice program to support consequences for wrongful acts committed.*

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2 This example is provided by Catholic Relief Services (Assessing Conflict in Water Development: A Guide for Water and Peacebuilding Practitioners. https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/water_conflict_final_online_rev0409.pdf.

3 Gehrig and Rogers describe the basic roles that water can play in conflict. Water can be a target in a conflict—for example, the destruction of water infrastructure as an act of war. It also can be a military or political tool, as in a military siege or political effort to control a water source, which in this sense may be a weapon. Water is increasingly a source of conflict, as shortages or allocation disputes cause friction.

TRADITIONAL DEVELOPMENT	CONFLICT SENSITIVE DEVELOPMENT
EDUCATION Donor education programs aim to strengthen education systems and ensure that populations acquire the education and skills to become productive members of society. *Traditional development* will usually focus on improving learning outcomes and expanding access to quality basic education. In poor or remote settings or when community tensions flare up, continuing education and advanced learning are harder to achieve. *CHALLENGE: A secondary education program prioritizes teacher training programs to improve curriculum development capacity. Proposed updates to science and history books include more information on the country's indigenous heritage. Although there is full buy-in from the Ministry of Education, political parties begin to take sides—some support the older curricula and others support the proposed new curricula. Historical concerns of discrimination against indigenous people resurface, leading to protests. As security is threatened, police presence grows, streets close, and school is interrupted. Fear of violence looms.*	A *conflict-sensitive response* first takes a moment to pause and reflect on the unexpected situation—to understand perspectives from all sides and parties and to assess what is at the root of discrimination against indigenous groups. *SOLUTION: Conduct a Rapid Education and Risk Analysis (RERA). A RERA adapts traditional education assessment questions to reflect the conflict context. For example:* • What is the relationship between the conflict and curriculum content? [4] What beliefs and norms are threatened by proposed curricula? • What are the perspectives of educators (teachers/administration/ministry personnel)? • What opportunities exist to reduce tension and enable schools to reopen? • What are the risks and protective factors that influence learners' safety? Share the results with key stakeholders and beneficiaries to facilitate conversations about the issues and support resolution.
HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE Humanitarian assistance aims to provide immediate care to populations in emergency settings following principles of inclusion, impartiality, neutrality, and humanity. Because of the urgency, scale, and immediateness of unexpected need, traditional development responses are triggered within days, if not hours. Such life-saving assistance may not have the time to follow conflict-sensitive approaches but at a minimum does not do further harm. *CHALLENGE 1: A natural disaster of high magnitude occurs, displacing thousands. Camps for uprooted families are established in a safe, alternate location. As displacement continues, resources, services, and patience are taxed and tension between camp residents and neighboring communities rises.[5]* *CHALLENGE 2: Complex security situations and difficulties getting access to permits can result in uneven distribution of aid. In some cases, relief packages vary within a single village, causing considerable unrest, mistrust of nongovernmental organizations, and outbreaks of violence.*	A *conflict-sensitive response* means humanitarian responders must consider possible harm or divisions food and funding assistance might provoke while planning their intervention. *SOLUTION 1: At a minimum, consult with local and host community representatives to build understanding and acceptance of affected populations and establish rapport between communities. Engage in ongoing discussions with neighboring communities to understand their needs and communicate the ongoing and transition plans for displaced families. Manage expectations by sharing information about camp plans. If neighboring communities express grievances about unaddressed needs, seek alternate funding or partnership to respond if possible.* *SOLUTION 2: : Ideally, conduct a rapid conflict/context analysis to understand composition and characteristics of groups in the target and surrounding areas, as well as their resource needs. Develop a rapport with community leaders and consider adaptable approaches for each village/group.*

4 South Sudan Rapid Education and Risk Analysis Report (USAID, February 2018). https://www.eccnetwork.net/sites/default/files/media/file/RERA_South_Sudan%20%281%29.pdf

5 Anne Stree, Humanitarian Practice Network, May 2012. https://odihpn.org/magazine/applying-conflict-sensitive-methodologies-in-rapid-onset-emergencies/

A How-To Reference

Conflict sensitivity is applicable to each phase of programming. This table provides an overview of illustrative actions and questions for the Planning, Design, Implementation, and Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning phases.

	DO	ASK
PLANNING	• Consider political, operational, and contextual dynamics of the country and target regions. • Examine the larger system in which USAID operates, including other donors and actors. • Conflict analysis informs the mission's strategy and operational practices; includes nuances of the conflict, such as criminality and extremism; and seeks feedback and sharing of findings with key partners.	1. How do the development problem and its root causes within each objective affect or interact with the conflict dynamics? 2. How will USAID build trusting relationships and communicate its purpose to host country partners? 3. How may political aspirations of the broader U.S. Government impact achievement of development goals and objectives? 4. How will USAID incorporate opportunities for stakeholder input during planning review sessions?
DESIGN	• Understand how achievement of the project purpose may impact conflict dynamics and encourage peace. • Use results from conflict dynamics and development context to inform the theory of change and design. • Identify local actors, gender dynamics, identity issues, relationships among actors, and relationships between actors and USAID. • Consider cross-sectoral and/or cross-donor cooperation to address root causes of tensions.	1. Which conflict dynamics, including key actors, are most concerning and need to be monitored? 2. Does the project purpose demonstrate understanding of the context, including gender dynamics and other identity groups? 3. Does the scope include key personnel descriptions that are considerate of the conflict dynamics? 4. How are funding options and flexibility for unexpected triggers of violence or other changes in the context built into the financial plan and technical requirements to allow for flexibility in programming based on evolving conflict dynamics?
IMPLEMENTATION	• Start-up requires local conflict analysis given time lapse between solicitation and award. • Achieve program results while avoiding unintended negative consequences. • Ensure collaborative conflict-sensitive design of scopes for grants under contracts. • Use adaptive management techniques and CLA across the startup and implementation spectrum.	1. What criteria will the implementing partner (IP) use to identify staff, partners, and target communities? Who will receive goods and services and who may feel excluded? 2. What processes will USAID put in place to encourage open and transparent communication? Whom will the program include/exclude? 3. How will USAID assess provisions of goods and services to ensure compliance and monitor unintended consequences that could ignite conflict?
COMPLEXITY-AWARE MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (CAMEL)	• Establish learning forums for USAID to regularly share learning from the field. • Consider community attitudes toward an intervention and possible or missed opportunities to support peace. • Help capture unintended results, alternative causes, nonlinear effects, and differing perspectives of interventions. • Communicate openness to learning from failure and options for adjusting design elements based on data and feedback. • Ensure the IP uses conflict-sensitive methods for data collection as well as appropriate staff given cultural and conflict dynamics.	1. How will USAID ensure distribution of findings to stakeholders and host government? What extra reporting may be needed by the IP to ensure transparency? 2. Are sector-based indicators for the activity considering the conflict dynamics in conjunction with gender roles and perspectives? 3. Are monitoring efforts going beyond quantitative measures to capture perceptions of the activity's interaction with conflict dynamics? How are such data being relayed and shared?