

Conflict sensitive approaches

A conflict sensitive approach identifies, and takes account of, issues within the local context and affected population that can aggravate existing tensions or fuel potential conflicts.

Conflicts are dynamic. They have many underlying causes such as poverty; inequality amongst ethnic, religious, or political groups; or discrimination and injustice e.g. around contested access to limited services or resources.

Humanitarian assistance given without consideration of conflict sensitivities increases the risk and incidence of violence through the diversion or manipulation of aid supplies, or tension over limited natural resources such as land, water, firewood or construction materials. This will waste limited aid resources and could cause further harm to those affected.



Guiding principles for a conflict sensitive approach

- Analyse the history, underlying causes and influences on the conflict.
- Recognise the potential and risks of external influence in conflict.
- Actively engage with all groups within the affected population in an impartial way.
- Identify vulnerable groups and engage potential peacemakers.
- Be transparent and clearly communicate your intentions.
- Do no harm and incorporate mechanisms by which you can be held accountable.
- Use timely, flexible and incentive-driven approaches.

Inform by the DAC Guidelines - Helping Prevent Violent Conflict © OECD, 2001

Steps in adopting a conflict sensitive approach

1: Analyse the context

- Research country's history, security, political, economic and social issues
- Identify and consult with all parties to the conflict where possible
- Identify triggers e.g. elections; arrest of local or political leaders; rapid unemployment; military coup; natural disaster; scarcity of basic commodities

2: Analyse dividers and connectors

- Identify sources of tension **dividing** groups e.g. economics, politics, religion, geography
- Analyse how people are also **connected** e.g. markets, history, symbols, shared attitudes
- Understand the interaction between your programmes and context

3: Design your strategy

- Apply your analysis:
- maintain a principled approach – neutrality, impartiality and independence - to eliminate negative, conflict-worsening impacts
 - do not miss the opportunity to support peace
 - re-check the impacts on dividers and connectors

Negotiating with parties to a conflict

Negotiations may be needed to:

- Maintain impartiality and protection and assistance to vulnerable groups
- Secure humanitarian access
- Improve understanding and respect for humanitarian law.

However, they must be undertaken in accordance with international law and the core humanitarian principles and should not indicate recognition or support for the views of armed groups. Particular caution is needed when:

- negotiations could negatively impact humanitarian conditions
- armed groups try to use negotiations to enhance their legitimacy
- armed groups play humanitarian actors off against each other.

Additional resources on the All In Diary web site

Guide to conflict sensitivity © Conflict Sensitivity Consortium 2012
Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Groups, © UNOCHA 2006
The Do No Harm Handbook © CDA 2004
Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit © Trocaire 2011

Web links for further information

Resources: <http://www.saferworld.co.uk/>
<http://www.international-alert.org/publications>
<http://cdacollaborative.org/publications/>
Toolkit: <http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/how-to-guide/>