Peace Sensitivity in Development Practice

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Within the peacebuilding as well as in the development sector there is an increased interest to seek greater synergies between development interventions (on the local level) in a socio-politically sensitive context and peacebuilding, focusing specifically on the role of development interventions to contribute towards positive social transformation on the implementing level. It is important to keep in mind that development projects should still do what they are best for, namely to assist in poverty alleviation and the promotion of sustainable development of certain regions and selected target groups. However, with greater peace sensitivity in planning and implementation of their activities, projects can be better equipped not to increase risks for social tensions at the local level (often unintended). They can also develop indicators for an early warning system about tensions within the context of the project and adjust activities when and where needed. Furthermore, development interventions could also contribute to concrete peace-supportive processes if planned and designed carefully.

This note does not aim to provide guidance to the application of peace sensitivity as such, but aims (a) to provide a short reflection about the need for peace sensitivity in development, (b) to briefly introduce some analytical parameters for peace sensitivity within development programming, and (c) to outline some key challenges in making peace sensitivity more applicable for development practice. This is followed by an Annex with some guiding questions for undertaking a socio-political analysis as the main basis for peace sensitivity.

Part 1: The Need for Peace Sensitivity

One of Alert's core pillars of capacity and programming support to the development sector is the recognition that peace-sensitive planning and monitoring ought to be an explicit aspect of development cooperation, in order to better mitigate the costs of economic and social tensions. This becomes even more crucial when the issue of sustainability within development interventions is understood beyond purely economic terms to include equally significant but often unrecognized factors of development such as social integration, human rights, and peaceful management of social tensions and disputes. Adopting a broader understanding such as this compels development initiatives to seek suitable tools and methodologies on how to adopt peace sensitive practices and translate these into concrete action.

Alert's therefore would argue that project interventions need to promote peace sensitivity of all developmental activities, development-oriented rehabilitation (with special attention towards local actors, especially women and youth) and capacity building of civil society structures for peaceful social transformation. Projects operating in politically highly sensitive areas are increasingly adapting a development-oriented rehabilitation approach. Similarly, it is critical to carefully adopt conventional development measures (e.g. management of natural resources, micro-finance strategies, vocational training programs etc.) to politically sensitive situations. An assessment and constant monitoring of the impact of such measures within the larger community structures of the beneficiaries will be crucial.

Peace assessments should be done frequently throughout the project cycle to provide key information on the impact of different project activities, and to decide on better planning strategies for four main areas:
- To recognize, monitor and address unintended "side-effects" of projects with possible potential to increase tensions and disputes within society ("do-no-harm"-approach)
- To identify and strengthen existing and additional project measures with a potential for positive socio-political transformation/ peace building ("do-some-good"-approach)

- To be aware of structural factors that cannot be changed and would place limitations to the project interventions – for example volatile macro and micro political circumstances
- To support – where appropriate and feasible – advocacy measures and/or add-on project activities (such as dialogue at various levels) to strengthen peace-supportive structural factors

It is also possible that changes that are not intended can appear due to the instability and the weakness of the existing structures. But, unintended changes through development interventions can also take place even under perceived normal conditions. Interventions necessarily introduce changes, if not in the project area, then outside. Within the narrow sense of the project objectives and project targets, such changes may not be significant and noticeable. But, there may be an important impact within the local society on existing or potential tensions. The challenge for development planners and implementers is to provide a framework for change that leads to socio-political transformation in a positive, constructive manner.

Impact of social change

Especially in the context of rapid social change, needs, especially those regarding human security, welfare, identity and freedom, can become contradictory to available opportunities. It is therefore important to ask how and in which areas human needs are not being properly fulfilled, and to assess the real and/or perceived reasons for these deficiencies (or social vulnerabilities). Social vulnerability draws upon different dimensions such as the access to and availability of basic resources. Resources here include more complex belongings such as social, cultural, and political assets, but particularly social relations.

The depletion of such social resources can render people vulnerable, as they may not be able to draw upon the usual problem-solving mechanisms when confronted with a critical situation. Such experiences can also result in social disarticulation, i.e., the disruption of formal and informal social networks at a community level. This may include factors such as a lack of social cohesion and communality, the reluctance of community members to invest in permanent community structures and a pervading sense of fatalism that hinder projects which attempt to mobilise community members to actively participate in their own development. Moreover, the increase in problems such as amplified social tensions and lawlessness severely obstructs community-oriented development work.

Part 2: Key Analytical Parameters for Peace Sensitivity

International Alert's work is guided by a Programming Framework that identifies five peace factors as analytical lens to understand how well-established and resilient peace is (or is not) in a given context. It provides a framework within which to evaluate the relative utility of institutions, policies, projects or tools from a peacebuilding perspective, and a lens through which to examine a context in terms of the features which either strengthen and enable or undermine and block peace and progress towards peace. Such a perspective allows the identification of opportunities to strengthen those features which are already quite robust, and/or to try and remove or circumvent those features which are obstacles to peace (see http://www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/programming-framework for further details). Those five peace factors are:

- **Power** The degree to which relationships between people, and between people and governing or otherwise powerful institutions, allow for participation, accountability, mutual support, and legitimate and effective decision-making and actions
- **Income and assets** The degree to which people have equal access to opportunities to make a living, and to invest in and manage economic assets which provide them with capital for further improving their livelihoods, and a cushion for difficult times

- **Law and justice** The degree to which people are predictably and equally accountable, and have equal opportunity for recourse under the law (incl. formal and informal norms and traditions)
- **Safety** The degree to which all people are able to stay safe from physical and psychological harm
- **Well-being** The degree to which people have equal access to shelter, health, education and a decent living environment, and can reasonably aspire to improve their living conditions.

The five peace factors are inter-related, in that each can reinforce or undermine the others. For example a positive impact on income and assets can negatively impact on human security in a socio-politically sensitive situation without well-established law and order as higher levels of income can increase the exposure to threats such as extortion, kidnapping and other forms of criminal activites. Programming strategies that aim towards interventions in one particular sector (e.g. income generating programs) need to take such dynamic into account in the design and implementation of respective programs if they want to avoid causing harm.

Power, and especially political power, is often seen as a key factor that can block or unblock successful peacebuilding. The political settlement approach proposes that state *power is captured by elites* who have decided on and maintain existing *power-sharing arrangements*. More equitable arrangements result in more stable peaceful societies. If one is to understand how elites have captured the state and how to challenge this, a focus on *understanding elite behaviour* and its significance for political process is crucial. For peacebuilding purposes, it is important to recognise that elites are a heterogeneous groups, some of whom are more motivated to work towards greater equity and together with whom, it is possible to successfully challenge existing elite/power arrangements. This perspective provides strategic direction to peacebuilding efforts.

A political settlement perspective provides strategic directions for engagement with an existing political system and enables bargaining for a more inclusive social and political contract between the state and citizenry. This perspective would also help *identify internal incentives (or pressure-points) to push for necessary reforms and changes*. And finally, an analysis that utilises this approach can help identify societal groups and constituencies that are particularly well-positioned to support such processes and who can strengthen the impact of change agents within the political system. An analysis of state-citizen relations (and the level of inclusivity of these relations) needs to incorporate the following perspectives:

- The *relationships between the centre and peripheral regions* and their respective elites. Power dynamics and structures in borderland areas can have significant impact on national level peace processes and vice versa and development interventions can impact on such relations
- The *relationship between the formal, informal, and illegal sectors*. A shadow economy strengthens power and authority of local strongmen, local political elites and clans, often with complex relations to elites at the regional and national level. There is a need to understand incentives and organisational structures that make shadow/informal economies thrive in order to develop measures to subdue them and/or integrate them into the formal economy
- The degree of *impersonal politics* (e.g. to what extent citizens can reasonably expect their rights and entitlements to be delivered by the state) versus the degree of *personalistic politics* (laws may exist but citizens need social and political 'connections' to enjoy them). Addressing the issue of political interference by political parties and other political stakeholders in the provision of state services is an important prerequisite to ensure successful implementation of reform programs, e.g. on social policy issues or the security and justice sector.

Part 3: Making Peace Sensitivity Applicable for Development Work

Applying peace sensitivity and making it work in the context (and constraints) of a project framework is not without challenges. There are a number of key issues that need to be taken into consideration in order to make peace sensitivity more tangible and more effective in terms of (positive) impact.

Issues of Scale: Linkages between Local Level Problems and the Wider Political Context

The specific aspects of local problems can only be understood in relation to the developments at the larger political levels. Project level impact assessments of all kinds tend to be rather weak on establishing such linkages between the micro and macro political levels. With restricted resources and the complexity of social and political tensions, peace assessments of project staff are prone to focussing their analytical efforts on the local level only. However, if the developments at the larger levels are not considered, local level efforts initiated at the project level may be counterproductive. Peacebuilding initiatives of solitary development organisations are anyhow difficult to integrate within a larger peacebuilding plan (if existing) due to the multitude of actors, interests, and objectives. Systematically including an analysis of the larger-level political developments in project planning thus can be considered a minimum requirement for project coherence. A regular desk-based analysis of the political operating framework of a project can be sufficient to reposition the project work in the changing political environment.

Issues of Identity and Behaviour

Any form of social assessments is prone to distortion effects resulting partly from the sensitivity of the topics under investigation, and partly from the assessor's own identity and behaviour that inevitably is reflected in the assessment. Both identity and behaviour are too complex issues to be discussed in detail at this point. Peace analysis requires a high level of social skills, based on empathy and sensitivity, as well as substantial self-criticism and reflection on the effects of one's own behaviour during the assessment. First of all, field assessors need to take great care to avoid stirring up sensitive topics in order to merely come up with significant data for the peace sensitivity assessment.

Also, the ethnic, political or social identity of an assessor is likely to affect the outcome of the assessment. For example, if the assessor belongs to one ethnic group A and is assigned to investigate the risks of a planned project intervention to stir up tensions in an area of ethnic group B with interests different from those group A, he or she will probably face difficulties in obtaining valid information on the matter, since members of group B are likely to be suspicious about the hidden agendas of the assessor. Also, the assessor may be too closely involved in the causes of certain socio-political tensions due to his upbringing and his perception of local politics, historical events, etc., which would impinge on his objectivity with regard to the interests of group B. On the other hand, if the assessor was to investigate the matter in his own ethnic group (A), the same problem of bias would arise. Identity is closely intertwined with one's self and a major cause for many internal problems.

Adequate selection of field staff for undertaking the field assessments thus remains a crucial and problematic issue. Often project directors face a true dilemma: on the one hand, they need field staff with extensive local knowledge and social networks; on the other hand, working on peace issues requires unbiased approaches and neutrality when it comes to program development.

While political affiliation and membership of certain groups of society will always be problematic, becoming aware of one's own identity role and identity-related behaviour during peace-related field work is a critical issue that needs to be addressed.

Issues of Power: Understanding Local Power Structures

The application of peace sensitivity skills relies heavily on the ability of project staff to establish good rapport with the community or group of people with whom they planned to work. Without establishing a reliable relationship it is very unlikely that people will be willing to discuss sensitive information concerning perceived or real risks and threats. Especially when a history of socio-political tensions exists, communities and people learn to guard their personal opinions. During periods of socio-political tensions, the socio-political, economic and psychosocial systems of beliefs and attitudes are easily politicised and seized upon by the opposing parties. Therefore, any individual perception of a particular problem can be made political, as it runs the risk of supporting or rejecting existing constructions of reality. These systems of belief and political instrumentalisation are reflected in power relationships.

If peace is to be carried out effectively and yield valid and reliable results, then the project team need to undertake great attempts to understand the power dynamics that structure the communities they work in. The staff themselves will inevitably become part of an existing system of beliefs and attitudes. The manner in which they communicate with the community and are perceived by the community will significantly influence what people will have to say on a particular issue, i.e. it will greatly affect the quality of the collected data. For example, if a politician visits a village and asks its residents about priority needs in their village, those needs are likely to differ from what would be disclosed to a local Village Health Worker in a home visit, or to a NGO representative undertaking an assessment of peace potentials.

Organisations bringing resources into communities are often required to work through or collaborate with local leadership (legitimate or not) in order to access the populations and communities that they represent. While it is essential to recognise and work with local leaders it must not be assumed that all groups and individuals represented by them will have equal access to them (leaders) or the resources which are distributed by them. Power dynamics within communities are not always apparent, especially for those who are not a part of that community. Where histories of socio-political tensions exist within communities, leadership bodies can be biased towards particular groups. As a result, an unofficial or illegitimate leadership may be preferred, recognised or feared by communities. For this very reason, it is important to seek popular opinions from within the community and allow decisions to be guided and influenced by both local leadership and the people whom they represent.

Obviously this becomes time consuming and is less feasible as part of emergency response than when planning a longer-term development project. However, it also impresses the importance of identifying mechanisms that have access to the shared knowledge by working within a particular area or with a particular community. Through such experience and rapport communities can be accessed and supported during emergencies.

Issues of Scope: Developing Assumptions about Peacebuilding Potentials

Assessing peacebuilding potentials in development practice tends to be an ad-hoc process of field investigation without proper preparation. However, this needs to be an analytical approach based on methodologies used in the social sciences. Developing hypotheses on peace potentials

needs to become a continuous process. In the very beginning of a peace analysis, hypothesising is an important step of scoping the assessment. Often, little seems to be known about the issues in a particular area and on a particular topic. During a structured hypothesizing process, basic information and the individual interpretations of a certain issue will become apparent. Often, a considerable amount of knowledge and assumptions are revealed during such preparatory sessions, which also clarifies the assessors' own roles and attitudes with regard to the assessment. In order to initiate the pre-appraisal hypothesizing process, it may be useful to broaden the scope of the assessment and discuss the context in which a particular problem can be explained in the respective area under consideration.

After the field assessment is undertaken, the process of hypothesising needs to continue as part of a monitoring effort. Initially made assumptions that could be verified at a certain point of time may not hold true at another time, especially after development measures have been implemented. Initial hypotheses serve as important accounts of how the potentials for peacebuilding have changed over time, e.g. how certain risks have decreased or become entirely irrelevant, and how some peacebuilding potentials resulted in positive social transformation. It will also help finding out the critical issues that are too difficult to be tackled by a small organisation, which can inform a re-scoping of efforts on more feasible issues, and thus work more effectively towards sustainable peace.

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Before starting any assessment exercise, the rationale of studying the relationships between and within communities of a specific area should be explained – e.g. why it is relevant for the institution to know the dynamics between communities before implementing a new project. Then a brief introduction of the team and project should be given. One needs to be frank and accurate about the project potential to avoid raising false hopes about benefits that the project may not be able to deliver. Finally, confidentiality should be assured to the respondent about the information gathered. It is important to inquire about different ethnic/ caste/ class/ religious/gender groups and to make a list of the important groups of people, including sub-groups along political, cultural lines and/or any other important identity related factors. Furthermore, the team needs to develop an understanding of different concepts of peace or lack thereof that they are likely to encounter when talking to people in the field and to adopt a process and concept that they want to pursue. As mentioned, Alert's programming framework provides a useful approach for this purpose in the form of 5 peace factors.

Guiding Questions for the Assessment

Context Background of the Proposed Intervention Area:
- Who are the communities that live here and when did they come here?
- What are the different ethnic/ caste/ religious groups? Are sub-groups within identified communities also included (e.g. on political, socio-cultural, religious lines)?
- What main sources of livelihoods/ jobs do people in these communities have?
- What have been the main concerns/ problems faced by people in these areas that have created socio-political tensions (and/or have the potential to escalate these tensions?
- Has the (perceived or real) lack of access to resources, such as natural resources, economic resources, institutional access and/or state support been a source of tensions between any communities/ groups?
- Do some groups feel discriminated against in terms of access to resources?
- Have these feelings led to tensions (between different groups)?
- What kind of resources and which groups do not have access to these resources?
- What are their perceptions and the reasons they give, for not having access?
- Are there any other problems or forms of discrimination that might lead to tensions or between communities/ groups?

Ensure that in the analysis different types of groups were explored – ethnic, religious, caste, political or any other groups that have a structural impact. Also ensure that possible inter-group tensions were probed. The specific experiences/ involvement of young people as well as women should have been explored and described as well in addition to other groups.

A number of key tensions with relevance for the proposed project implementation should be analysed in more detail. It is important that this goes beyond the immediate causes of tensions (e.g. disputes over scare resources) and describes root-causes of existing or likely tensions between groups (e.g. why are they not able to solve such disputes in a peaceful manner).

Context profile/ causes:
- **When** and **why** did these tensions begin? Are there r reasons other than the obviously stated reasons for these tensions?
- **How** have the reasons for these tensions developed/ changed over the last years?
- **Where** exactly do these tensions take place/ occur mostly?
- **What** type of tensions have occurred in the past or are likely to occur in the future?

Do-No-Harm Focused Stakeholder Analysis:

- What factors are preventing the tension from becoming worse? (connecting factors - people/ institutions/ events)?
- Who is involved at the community level (or from outside) as connectors to resolve tension filled relationships?
- Have there been instances where tensions were avoided by external or internal intervention?
- Which factors are making tensions or potential for tensions worse (dividing factors – people/ institutions/ events)?
- Who is directly involved as dividers in these tension filled relationships? Whom do they mainly affect?
- Who is indirectly involved/ affected in these tension filled relationships?
  o Are there activities that are done together between the different groups? If there are no (or only few) joint activities, what are the reasons for this?
- Are there any institutions/ people who work towards building relationships with both sides? (e.g. by supporting joint activities/ working together etc.). - If not, why?
- Are there community-based forms of peacebuilding? How successful are they? If not, what are the reasons that they are not working anymore?
- Who would benefit from these tensions that could escalate socio-political tensions? How? What are the external factors that add to the tension between these groups?

Assessment of Programme and Institutional Impact

Based on above analysis the DNH framework can be utilised to assess the peace sensitivity of the proposed interventions. There are many "key questions" available for this purpose (see below example). However, it is important to stress that the quality of applying any of such key questions depends on the quality (and rigour) of above outlined socio-political context analysis. Any assessment of project proposals therefore needs to carefully scrutinize this analysis undertaken by staff or partners along above outlined checklist.

Do-No-Harm Key Questions:

- WHY (are communication mechanisms in place to ensure that communities are fully briefed; is transparency and accountability ensured; is dignity of beneficiaries ensured; does the project avoid negative messages etc.)?
- WHERE (does the response area coincide or cross lines of divisions/ tensions; could the intervention location indicate any alliances with certain political groups; are land titles disputed; is there any political manipulation in regard to selection of locations etc.)?
- WHAT (could aid resources be diverted or controlled by specific actors, including local authorities; is procurement linked to any party; will external resources distort the local economy; could the intervention be used by certain groups for their own benefit etc.)?
- WHEN (does timing of intervention coincide with any triggers for socio-political tensions; does it make any beneficiaries/ staff vulnerable to the fallout of such tensions; what exit strategies are in place etc.)?
- TO/ BY WHOM (do targeting criteria coincide with lines of divisions or strengthen dividers/ dividing factors; do staff or implementing partners represent any specific groups; do political actors attempt to control targeting etc.)?
- HOW (is there a fair process of taking decisions over resource distribution; is service provision accessible for all (e.g. language); do any local elites benefit more than others from the project; is local civil society mobilised in support of the project without that leading to tensions etc.)?

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