



INTERNATIONAL ALERT

## Peace and Conflict-sensitive Approaches to Development

A briefing for the OECD DAC Task Force on  
Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation  
and the  
Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Network (CPRN)

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## Introduction

This paper has been written by Saferworld, International Alert and the International Development Research Centre for the OECD Task Force for Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation and the CPR Network. It draws on the findings of these organisations' research, policy dialogue and field work on approaches to peace and conflict-sensitive development, and has been informed by a Consultative Meeting held in Ottawa in November 2000. This Meeting was attended by government, academic and civil society experts from around the world. The paper is divided into three sections: an overview of the policy frameworks within which approaches supporting peace and conflict-sensitive development practice will be applied; an examination of the different types of approaches that have been developed and key areas in which they need to be enhanced; and an outline of some of the main institutional changes required for effective conflict prevention and peace-building.

Growing understanding of the links between conflict, development and external assistance has increased attention on the role which Official Development Assistance (ODA) can play in both ameliorating and exacerbating the root causes of violent conflict. The *OECD–DAC Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation* (first published in 1997) represented a significant shift in donor thinking with respect to conflict prevention. These Guidelines explore how ODA can contribute proactively to conflict prevention, post conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction, and peace-building. Further, the Guidelines suggest that co-ordinated and coherent responses which explicitly address root causes of conflict have the potential to make a long-term positive impact on violent conflict. Since the publication of the Guidelines, many donors have been seeking ways of integrating conflict prevention objectives and strategies into the range of ODA instruments and, in doing so, have developed and selectively employed a range of tools, approaches and frameworks. This has also necessitated policy and institutional changes which aim to assist the mainstreaming of conflict prevention.

## Policy frameworks

Amongst donors, significant progress has been made in developing policies which explicitly attempt to integrate conflict prevention and peace-building into ODA. The EU and OECD-DAC for instance, have identified significant root causes of conflict and have taken steps to provide guidance on policy implementation. However, several policy issues still need to be addressed if conflict-sensitive development is to make progress on the ground.

### ***Supporting security sector reform***

Recognition that sustainable human security is a prerequisite for poverty eradication has meant that a number of donors have integrated security sector reform (SSR), linked to policies of good governance, into ODA. However, many donors have faced political constraints which have prevented the introduction of SSR as part of ODA. This has had implications for the coherence of approaches among donors and across instruments.

Greater clarity is needed as to the types of policies and programmes which donors can legitimately support. The conceptual framework developed by the DAC Task Force is a significant step toward the clarification of objectives. However, further detail is required to guide member states on the actual practice and implementation of the framework.

- The DAC Task Force needs to develop interpretative guidelines to assist member states in the implementation of SSR assistance.
- OECD members are urged to review their current policies with respect to security and governance programmes and to bring them in line with the conceptual framework being proposed by the DAC Task Force.
- Implementation needs to be monitored and evaluated to encourage compliance and to assure donors that assistance is used to support development objectives.

### ***Providing humanitarian assistance according to international norms***

Respect for international humanitarian law should be a prerequisite in aid disbursement strategies. Donor approaches to the provision of relief in this context must take the humanitarian imperative as the baseline for intervention. Humanitarian action is highly political. Tensions often exist between responding to immediate need of civilians and dealing with the opposing interests of parties to the conflict.

- It is essential that humanitarian assistance be distributed on the basis of established humanitarian need and not according to its likely impact on conflict dynamics.
- Donors and humanitarian actors need to recognise the limitations of humanitarian assistance in complex political emergencies and undertake to find political solutions at the same time as providing relief.
- Reviews and evaluations of humanitarian intervention need to be more widely undertaken to understand more explicitly the links between aid and conflict. These findings need wide dissemination in order to influence practice.

### ***Targeting assistance to improve policy performance***

There is concern that new performance criteria adopted by donors (e.g. on good governance) could become a new form of conditionality, which inadvertently penalises conflict-prone countries. Some countries may be unable to meet the performance criteria because of chronic instability and conflict rather than a lack of will or effort.

- It is vital that donors engage with governments who are willing but unable to meet performance criteria, and assistance should be targeted to help in this way.
- For those host governments that do not demonstrate the political will to meet these criteria, it is recommended that innovative ways are sought to channel ODA through non-state actors to help to create the conditions for sustainable development.

## **Tools, frameworks, and approaches to peace– and conflict-sensitive development practice**

A number of tools, frameworks and approaches have been developed to support peace and conflict-sensitive development practice. Their development is based on the rationale that on-going understanding of peace and conflict dynamics can lead to a discernible improvement in the quality of ODA. These approaches rely on assumptions about the nature, causes and dynamics of conflict; they attempt to systematise and present these assumptions in an accessible form which can assist non-specialists in understanding a complex situation.

The approaches developed thus far fulfil a number of important functions including: analysis of potential conflict risks; early warning for early response; and processes designed to assist practitioners in designing country assistance strategies in conflict-prone regions. Tools have been developed which assist both **sectoral and project planning** and which look at the impact of actual policies and programmes on conflictual situations and which analyse the impact that conflict has on development projects. **Tools for identifying and addressing the root causes of violent conflict**, for instance, are perceived as critical for planning and policy development. Through enhanced understanding of the conflict risks associated with development and humanitarian programmes it becomes feasible to mitigate violent conflict.

**Early warning and early response tools**, can prompt specific actions in mitigating conflict before the outbreak of widespread violence. Sectoral strategies and project implementation, based on rigorous and incisive analysis of conflict risks, allow estimation of the impact of policies and programmes on the likelihood of the emergence of violent conflict. **Planning at the project level**, which includes participatory stakeholder analysis, can provide an understanding of the range of actors and their interests in a specific conflict as well as options for promoting

local capacities and opportunities for peace through ODA.

The growth of peace-building projects has coincided with increased pressure on ODA to demonstrate impact. Both donors and implementing agencies are grappling with the need to develop indicators that signal impact on peace and conflict dynamics. **Evaluation tools** can therefore play an important role in assessing, monitoring and mitigating the potential negative consequences of engagement in both latent and open conflict. These can point to recommendations for future engagement which seek to minimise the risks of violent conflict.

There is also a growing appreciation among donors of the difficulties associated with applying tools and frameworks. These difficulties derive from, for example, the diversity of war-torn societies, the uniqueness of approaches, the intrinsically political nature of conflict analysis, limited capacity and resources for this type of analysis and the constraints of funding and accountability frameworks. If tools are to be effectively implemented, the following issues will need to be addressed.

### ***Promoting dialogue***

The approaches described above need to be developed and rigorously applied in national settings, with the full participation of local stakeholders. The objective should be to develop approaches which are tailored to local needs and priorities. Local ownership is crucial if the process of implementation is to be driven by local concerns. This dialogue is fundamental to ensuring effective application.

Host governments and southern civil society have been largely absent from the design and implementation of tools, frameworks and approaches for peace and conflict-sensitive development practice. These approaches have primarily emerged from northern academic and policy institutions in co-operation with donor governments and multilateral institutions with little space given to national governments and to indigenous approaches and southern perspectives.

- Donors need to ensure that the design and implementation of approaches to peace and conflict-sensitive development occur with the full collaboration of actors from northern and southern perspectives.

### ***Applying and piloting tools***

Although substantial efforts have been made to develop a range of specific tools, to date, few attempts have been made to apply them or to evaluate their impact on peace and conflict dynamics. Donors have been reluctant to implement untried tools, frameworks and approaches.

- There is therefore a need for donors to invest in the development and application of the range of tools, through selective pilot initiatives.
- There is a specific need for the further development of evaluation tools and indicators for conflict resolution and peace-building. Innovative approaches are required because standard approaches to evaluating development projects may be inappropriate for assessing their impact on peace-building.

### ***Incorporating human rights***

Approaches to peace and conflict-sensitive development need to be informed and guided by international human rights standards. Approaches that promote an unjust ‘stability’ could ultimately create more violent conflict in the long run. Having said that, many frameworks acknowledge that widespread and increasing abuses of human rights are important indicators of conflict and early warning. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that peace should be commensurate with access to human rights and justice, however, there is less certainty as to how this can be achieved in practice.

- Approaches need to strike the right balance between the advancement of human rights and the achievement of stability. The aim should be the establishment of sustainable development and a just peace.
- Development practice has to ensure that injustice and inequality are not entrenched. It is therefore essential that in inequitable situations, development projects address justice and rights.

### ***Applying peace and conflict-sensitive approaches to the full range of policy instruments***

The approaches discussed are a key element in enhancing ODAs impact in favour of conflict prevention and peace-building. However to be effective, they need to be applied across the full range of instruments and implemented in a coherent and effective manner. For example, conflict-sensitive development practices could be of limited use if they are not matched by responsible controls on arms flows and equitable trade policies.

- The use of conflict-sensitive approaches should not be restricted to ODA, but should include “political” instruments such as targeted sanctions, trade tariff policies, arms export controls and diplomatic measures.
- The development of appropriate instruments will require a much deeper analysis of conflict contexts and a greater understanding of the limited role that ODA alone can play in the absence of complementary foreign policy instruments and of political commitment.

- Tools, frameworks and approaches also need to be regularly monitored to ascertain their suitability and efficiency for enhancing conflict prevention in specific circumstances.

## **Institutionalising conflict prevention**

Donors have also taken steps to institutionalise conflict prevention through, for example, the establishment of units responsible for conflict prevention within foreign ministries or development cooperation agencies. Whilst this is a welcome advance, there is a danger that such units may be isolated from mainstream political decision-making and programming processes. Without the implementation of coherent policies across government departments, and involving the full range of aid, trade, diplomacy and military instruments, the effectiveness of these institutions may be limited. Therefore conflict prevention policies and activities need to be mainstreamed across the range of policy instruments and their implementation.

### ***Improving coherence and co-ordination***

Donor governments and major multilateral donors such as the World Bank have recognised that effective conflict prevention and peace-building require improved coherence between the full range of external policy instruments, not just those of ODA. There is also a need for greater co-ordination during the implementation of programmes. Donor/NGO co-operation in conflict assessment can also enhance the coherence of multi-agency responses to a conflict and lead to improved co-ordination of activities.

There is still a wide divergence among OECD members in terms of their progress on development and conflict issues. Donors have divergent policies and priorities, having reached different stages of both policy development and operationalisation of those policies. There is also variety in the interpretation of major issues which inform policy, for example, security and conditionality. This impedes progress towards coherence, co-ordination in field, on-going dialogue, understanding of major issues and ultimately the impact and effectiveness of ODA.

- The DAC Task Force for Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation is therefore strongly urged to establish a compliance unit to monitor and support the implementation of DAC Guidelines by Member States. Such a unit could also play an important role in monitoring and encouraging coherence.
- OECD Member States should agree that the tools, frameworks and approaches should be applied to all countries with potential for conflict, not just in countries where there is open conflict.

- Donors should establish national compliance units which could play a positive and supporting role in aligning donor practice in conflict-prone and conflict-affected countries.
- Donors also need to ensure that all relevant ministries participate in policy development and implementation. This is vital if conflict prevention policies and practices are to be mainstreamed into the full range of policy instruments at a donor's disposal.
- Field- and country-level co-ordination addressing conflict issues among donors is important. While this is often well developed in countries of open conflict, in many conflict-prone countries it is lacking or non-existent.

### ***The need for long term approaches***

Peace-building is a long-term process: structural inequalities within society, such as gross disparities of wealth and inequitable power relationships require long-term sustained engagement by donors.

- A long-term orientation which addresses the full conflict cycle and which links short-term emergency measures to long-term programmes will be required for maximum sustainability.

### ***Capacity building***

In order to ensure more effective mainstreaming of conflict prevention, more will need to be done to improve conflict analysis capacity within organisations. Policies are then more likely to address the root causes of violence in ways which are most relevant to local circumstances. Capacity building is crucial if communities and local administrations are to become involved in decision-making and implementation processes.

- The capacity of donor governments too needs to be reinforced as this has been identified as a limiting factor in programme effectiveness. There is a need to invest in capacity building amongst mission and headquarters' staff in peace and conflict assessment, analysis and evaluation as well as in community approaches to development which specifically aim to reduce inequalities and promote justice.
- Donors are also encouraged to share and jointly discuss country strategy papers and programme evaluations, where conflict is an issue, as a means of promoting lessons learned.
- Donors will have to support the peace-building initiatives and capacities of host governments, who have been largely absent from the development of these policies and programmes.

- Donors should attempt to decentralise assistance to district level, where appropriate, and this will require concomitant attention to the development of capacity at that level. In many conflict-prone countries the central government may not be well placed to address conflict issues at local level.
  
- There is a need to support existing initiatives and build the capacity of local and international NGOs to influence policy-making and implementation processes.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that the range of analytical tools, frameworks and approaches to peace- and conflict-sensitive development practice can make an important contribution to the prevention of violence when developed and applied appropriately. However, it is vital that they are seen as one part of a comprehensive approach and not as a panacea or a substitute for political action. Actors need to work together to support and encourage change on the wider issues which may be fuelling conflict, such as state oppression, or the impact of international financial institutions or trade policies, whilst working to reduce inequality and violence at the local level. Concerted efforts can at least ensure consistency of aims and expectations.

There is still some way to go before effective and coherent approaches to conflict are in place. While much has been learned and is known about conflict, aid and development there is still much to be discovered. Well-funded, well-grounded, empirical field-level applied research is needed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the linkages between conflict, aid and development. This research can then be used to further enhance donor policy and practice in this area. Questions of capacity, resource allocation, political choices, political commitment, and the availability of coherent and effective instruments will also have to be addressed if conflict prevention is to shift from the theoretical to the practical realm, and if the ultimate objective of enhancing the security and livelihoods of people affected by conflict is to be achieved.