Providing Aid Agencies with Tools for Conflict-Sensitive Practice: Lessons Learned from Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA)

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Abstract

Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) and other conflict-sensitive analytical tools are currently high on the agenda of development and humanitarian organisations. This article asks how far these tools can actually contribute to better development and humanitarian assistance in the context of conflict. For this, it attempts to match agency expectations with the existing tools for conflict analysis and impact assessment. It discusses key methodological challenges to developing conflict-sensitive tools and looks at the lessons learned from using them within aid administrations. The paper concludes on a cautious note, calling for more realistic expectations regarding the analysis that can be provided and reminding aid agencies that tools are just one element in the complex process of mainstreaming conflict-sensitivity.

Introduction

Within the last decade, there has been an increasing recognition of the linkages between development, emergency assistance and violent conflict. Whether development and humanitarian agencies wish to influence the conflict outcome or just assist its victims, the emerging consensus holds that they should at least become more aware of it. Indeed, major policy documents such as the OECD/DAC Guidelines (OECD 2001), the EC Communication on Conflict Prevention (2001), and the UN Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict (United Nations 2001) encourage aid organisations to develop and use analytical tools for better understanding conflict, operationalising their peacebuilding goals and monitoring the impact of their work. These tools are now widely discussed under the heading of Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA), although many of them actually relate to conflict analysis and planning.

In this article, I ask what development and humanitarian organisations can actually expect from these tools. For this, I will provide an overview of existing tools and examine both the methodological and institutional aspects of developing and using conflict-sensitive tools. The aim is to relate the two to each other, that is, to clarify what kinds of analysis these tools can offer and how they can be applied within agencies. Finally, I outline areas for further work on methodologies and mainstreaming conflict-sensitive practice.

PCIA: The History of an Idea

This section reviews the origin and evolution of the idea of peace and conflict impact assessment. Through the discussion I show how the original concern with criteria for evaluating the impact of development programmes and projects on the dynamics of

violent conflict triggered the creation of an array of conflict-sensitive analytical tools. These tools now span most levels and phases of development co-operation and humanitarian assistance.

PCIA has several origins, and it is now hard to say which one was the primary. At donor level, it is worth noting that the Task Force of the OECD/DAC already highlighted the need for conflict impact assessments in its Policy Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation adopted in May 1997. The Council of the European Union called for the development of conflict impact assessment as early as in its relevant Conclusions of November 1998. According to one observer (Landgraf 2000:115), the main concern at that time was to justify the expenditure of public funds for such risky ventures as conflict prevention.

At NGO headquarters and in the field, it was the 'do no harm' debate launched by Mary Anderson in 1994 that highlighted the need for a more systematic attention to the impact of aid on conflict. Anderson began publishing a series of influential reports showing how development and humanitarian assistance can unintentionally fuel violent conflict by conferring resources and legitimacy to those waging war (Anderson 1996). At the same time, a number of other researchers warned that international assistance can undermine local coping strategies. This can involve delegitimising traditional structures or deepening regional imbalances, contributing to conflict (de Waal 1997, Uvin 1998). Humanitarian assistance in particular was criticised for unwittingly prolonging wars by providing the warlords with cash and modern equipment (through theft, fees, or bribery) and by freeing up local resources for the war effort (Prendergast 1997). These findings resounded well within an aid community, which was intent on learning the lessons from the ill-fated military 'humanitarian operation' in Somalia (1993) and its involuntary implication in the genocide in Rwanda (1994). Summarising a common feeling, Mary Anderson postulated that aid should at least 'do no harm' in the sense of further fuelling or prolonging violent conflict.

The mid-1990s crisis of international co-operation in the face growing civil strife triggered a range of responses within the aid community, which can be broadly divided along humanitarian and developmental lines. Among humanitarianists, the predominant reaction was to reassert the principles of humanitarianism of neutrality and impartiality against the politicisation of aid in the context of conflict. This was complemented by efforts to enhance the accountability of humanitarian actors towards those they are aiming to assist. Initiatives such as the SPHERE project, the Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP) and the Quality Project are examples of this approach (Hilhorst 2001). Within the development community, on the other hand, the predominant feeling was that development co-operation had the potential to help prevent or reduce violent conflict by addressing its structural causes in a long-term perspective. Development agencies, therefore, looked for ways of better understanding the relationship between aid and conflict. One of these was PCIA.

Championed by academics-cum-practitioners such as Luc Reychler (1999) and Kenneth Bush (1998), the original idea of PCIA was to provide aid agencies with a methodology to assess the impact of their work on conflict — similar to gender and environmental impact assessment. The Do No Harm debate was influential here in two ways. First, it highlighted the difference between intentions and impact. This is not so say that before aid agencies did not distinguish between their objectives and what they had actually been able to achieve on the ground. This is a routine issue for evaluation specialists. In the context of PCIA, Kenneth Bush (1998) developed this idea further by introducing the

distinction between developmental impact (e.g. more children attend primary school) and peacebuilding impact (e.g. these children belong to only one group, this leads to increased tensions with the other disadvantaged group) and exploring the tensions between both.

The distinction between intention and impact also usefully highlighted the fact that any form of intervention in the context of violent conflict — whether humanitarian, developmental or conflict prevention in the narrow sense of the word — impacts upon the conflict. The logical conclusion from this is that conflict prevention and peacebuilding cannot be regarded as narrow sectoral activities, as which they are now increasingly practised. Rather, they are the desired impact of any form of co-operation with people living in areas of instability. Again, it was Kenneth Bush (1998), who emphasised the character of peacebuilding as impact, not activity. In this sense PCIA clearly promotes a mainstreaming agenda to peacebuilding: it looks at the impact of all forms of intervention on conflict and so aims at promoting more conflict-sensitive practice in all sectors.

> ### What was new for aid agencies was the idea of *unintended* negative impact and the sense of its possible scale, and that a well-intentioned aid operation could go catastrophically wrong.

Do No Harm also influenced the orientation of many PCIA methodologies towards the operational aspects of aid, although its imperative is relevant to all types of relations with countries in conflict. Yet in the following years, Mary Anderson's widely publicised Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCPP) mainly worked with NGOs to explore the relation between local conflicts and their delivery of development and humanitarian assistance. These were mostly seen in the risk of fomenting conflict between the communities agencies were working with or strengthening local warlords (Anderson 1999). What Do No Harm failed to develop was a broader political perspective, which looked at the use of aid for promoting broader foreign policy, economic, cultural or military objectives — both by actors in donor and recipient countries. This narrow perspective also had an effect on PCIA, which in the beginning was geared towards identifying the effects of individual project interventions. This view gradually widened, however, as both donor governments and NGOs became more interested in the impact of aid programmes, country strategies or even the aid system as a whole (e.g. Goodhand with Atkinson 2001).

The perspective of PCIA did not only expand from project to country, there was also a notable shift from impact assessment/evaluation to a more comprehensive approach to the entire programme and project management cycle. Traditional evaluations assess the impact of an intervention ex-post, that is, after it has been completed. This makes little sense in the context of violent conflict as there is a higher risk that errors lead to the loss of human lives and any mistakes therefore need to be immediately corrected. It was clear then that PCIA should take place during the implementation of an initiative. Or even better, PCIA should help assess its likely impact while it is still in the planning stage. This goes parallel to gender, poverty and environmental impact assessment, which take place during project appraisal to help detect and avoid negative effects on women or the environment. This so-called ex-ante impact assessment (see CPN 1999 as example of an early attempt in this direction) poses considerable methodological challenges as it

requires predictions about the possible course of the conflict and its interlinkages with the planned initiative.

The ex-ante dimension of PCIA, which makes it a planning tool, has so far proved most attractive to aid agencies and is now furthest developed. This seems to be linked to the fact that developing analytical tools has been one of the first things most agencies have done when starting to work on conflict more systematically. In this situation, planning and implementing conflict-sensitive programmes and projects is more of a priority than evaluation. For this, they need reliable, structured information about the conflicts they wanted to affect and support by setting peacebuilding priorities. In the following, a number of organisations, which began their tools-related work with the 'buzz-word' PCIA ended up with methodologies for conflict-sensitive strategic planning (e.g. compare DfID 1999 with DfID 2002). Most planning methodologies, however, do contain a component of assessing the impact of past engagement on the conflict.

At present, development agencies are developing, testing and using a range of analytical tools for situation analysis, planning and programme/project management in the context of conflict. These tools are now called strategic conflict assessment, peace and conflict analysis, conflict vulnerability analysis, benefit-harms analysis, portfolio analysis and many others. As they are accumulating experience in this area and the first conflict-sensitive development and humanitarian programmes are well on track, aid agencies now can start looking again at the evaluation of these activities (e.g. SIPU 2000 as an early example). CROSS This proliferation of tools makes it increasingly difficult to refer to them as 'PCIA', as methodologically they now go far beyond impact assessment. CROSS For lack of a better term, I will call them 'conflict-sensitive analytical tools'.

Overview of Existing Tools and their Application

In this section, I examine the areas, in which development and humanitarian organisations are currently using conflict-sensitive analytical tools, and look at the methodologies, which have been developed for these purposes. Some of these areas are already well-developed, while there are still a series of 'blind spots'. The following table outlines the principal purposes of conflict-sensitive tools and indicates some organisations developing or working with such tools.

Table 1: Areas of application

	Conflict Analysis/Planning	Monitoring/Evaluation
Country level	OECD, WB, UNDP, EC/CPN, USAID, DfID, SDC, GTZ, Clingendael	BMZ, Clingendael
Programme/ Project level	Oxfam, CARE	USAID, SIDA, Norway, DANIDA, CARE, FDI
Community level	LCPP, RTC, IEPADES	LCPP, RTC, Oxfam

While organisations increasingly strive to develop tools to cover their entire programming and project cycle, it still makes sense to distinguish them according to the major purposes, that is conflict analysis, strategy formulation and planning on the one hand, and implementation, steering, monitoring and evaluation on the other. The table above shows that most attention so far has been paid to tools for conflict-sensitive strategic planning at country level and the evaluation of individual projects. This reflects the particular interest of donors to get the main parameters of their country programming right and to

see whether the projects they funded delivered what they had promised. There are less methodologies responding to NGO concerns with project and community level conflict analysis and planning as well as with the overall impact of donor and government policies on conflict in their countries.

Conflict Analysis and Strategic Planning

Multilateral organisations and bilateral donors have so far focussed on conflict analysis tools to support aid programming at country, and to a lesser extent, project level. These conflict analysis tools serve to support strategic decisions on the overall structure of the aid portfolio, the sector, content, location and target groups of individual projects, and on priorities for policy dialogue with partners. Their aim is to analyse conflict potentials and peacebuilding needs, assess the organisation's existing policies and programmes in terms of their positive or negative impact on conflict, and provide recommendations for enhancing coherence and positive impact in terms of peacebuilding. Thereby, country strategies are a critical entry point for defining peacebuilding objectives for individual conflict-affected countries. Some agencies (e.g. EC, DfID, SDC, GTZ) have therefore begun a process of introducing conflict assessments into the review of their country strategies.

Two forms of conflict analysis at country-level have crystallised so far: quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative conflict analysis methods rely on generic checklists of quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess the potential for conflict or identify priority areas for intervention. The indicators frequently come from early warning models and are then adapted to the specific interests of development and humanitarian organisations. Examples of such indicator-based approaches to conflict analysis are the various PIOOM checklists for country conflict profiles (Schmid 1998), the European Commission's Conflict Impact Assessment Tool (CPN 1999) and Checklist of Root Causes of Conflict (2001), and the FEWER methodology for conflict analysis and response definition (FEWER 2001). The following checklist, which the European Commission uses to screen the conflict risks in its partner countries at the begin of each new presidency, is one of the most condensed versions. The countries with the highest conflict risk score are brought to the attention of the relevant meetings of political decision-makers.

Box 1: Quantitative checklist for conflict screening

> **European Commission, External Relations Directorate General, Checklist for Root Causes of Conflict (2001)**
> - Legitimacy of the State
> - Rule of law
> - Respect for fundamental rights
> - Civil society and media
> - Relations between communities and dispute-solving mechanisms
> - Sound economic management
> - Social and regional inequalities
> - Geopolitical situation

Source: European Commission 2001. In the original document, these general areas of concern are further specified by about three to five sub-questions each.

Quantitative conflict analysis methods have the advantage of being brief, easily accessible, and quick and cheap to conduct. This makes them more acceptable to many practitioners than complex qualitative approaches. Because of their short format, they can also be better integrated into an organisation's routine procedures, which is an important step

towards mainstreaming conflict-sensitivity (e.g. EC 2002). They are unlikely, however, to provide an in-depth understanding of the conflict or reveal any new aspects. Problematic is also that they use ready-made sets of questions or indicators, which necessarily cannot accommodate the specificities of each conflict. Therefore, checklists and other quantitative methods are best suited to regularly overview a large number of countries for conflict risks, to monitor countries at risk of conflict (early warning), and also to screen projects for their likely impact on conflict. Their main function is to alert staff and decision-makers to conflict risks, which can then be explored further using more in-depth methods.

Qualitative conflict analysis methods use open frameworks, which guide users to examine issues such as context, structures, institutions, actors, issues, and attitudes. They aim less at exact measurement than at understanding complex linkages and trends. For the purpose of aid programming, qualitative conflict analysis explores the relation between main actors and issues driving the conflict and the organisation's development, humanitarian and possibly other policies and programmes. Usually, it also involves an assessment of the organisation's capacities (expertise, trust, networks, finance) and previous experience in order to identify how it can respond to opportunities for promoting peace and justice more effectively. Some organisations also use these exercises to look at the work of other international and national actors to explore opportunities for enhanced coherence, better co-ordination or critical engagement. Finally, recommendations are provided for enhancing the conflict-sensitivity of existing programmes and implementing new peacebuilding initiatives. A typical example of this approach is the conflict assessment methodology developed by the UK Department for International Development (DfID 2002).

Box 2: Qualitative conflict analysis for country programming

Department for International Development, Conflict Assessment Framework (2002)
I.   Conflict analysis
- Structures
- Actors
- Dynamics

II.   Analysis of international response
- International actors
- Development actors
- Interactions between development interventions and conflict

III.   Developing strategies and options
- Common donor approaches
- Conflict sensitive individual donor approaches
    — Adjusting current activities
    — Developing new initiatives

Source: DfID 2002

While quantitative conflict analysis can rely on secondary data, qualitative conflict analysis typically requires a field study with expert and stakeholder consultations. This requires the organisation to invest considerable amounts of time and money in the exercise. More lead time is also required until results are available, some of which may be quickly outdated again. For these reasons, in-depth qualitative conflict analysis is usually chosen when important decisions have to be made. This can be the review of a country strategy, the appraisal of a new programme or project, or generally the early

days of an organisation's work on conflict. Particularly when starting to respond to the threat of violent conflict more systematically, many organisations have found it useful to initiate in-depth conflict analyses of individual countries. Such studies have an important awareness raising effect among regional staff, stimulate intra-organisational communication and provide baseline date for further — briefer — analysis. In a long-term perspective, it appears that a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to country-level conflict analysis works best for development and humanitarian organisations. Detailed studies at critical junctures can be regularly updated, expanded and revised by using focussed quantitative tools.

There are still less methodologies available to support conflict analysis and planning at project and community level. In general, they need to be more flexible and participatory than tools for country-level analysis, so that they can be adapted to a variety of contexts and allow for the inclusion of stakeholders. They also tend to reflect a stronger awareness that the process of conflict analysis itself is already an intervention in the local conflict situation. Therefore, more emphasis is placed on inclusive processes such as joint problem definition, consultation with various stakeholder groups, and joint definition of priorities. Analytically, local structures, needs and solutions receive more attention than broad policy prescriptions.

Among the tools for project-level conflict analysis for planning, Mary Anderson's Do No Harm analytical framework is now widely used among NGOs. Responding to Conflict (Fisher *et al.* 2000) has developed a comprehensive toolbox of participatory approaches to conflict analysis, project planning, implementation and evaluation. It mainly draws on problem-solving techniques as well as Participatory Rural Assessment tools (e.g. Pretty et a*l.* 1995). Although primarily directed at peace activists, development and humanitarian agencies can also use them with the communities they work with. Some larger NGOs such as Oxfam (Dawson 2000) and CARE (CARE 2001) have developed their own methodologies.

Conflict-Sensitive Monitoring and Evaluation

Methodologies for conflict-sensitive monitoring and evaluation are still less developed than those for conflict analysis and planning. Despite the strong attention paid to country-level conflict analysis, very few attempts have been made so far to evaluate the impact of development and humanitarian policies and programmes on the course of conflict at this level (e.g. Goodhand with Atkinson 2001). Where this analysis has taken place, it was conducted by academics using methodologies that are not readily replicable by aid agencies. The most notable exception was the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (1996), which assessed the role of the international aid community in the genocide and the developments in its aftermath. Methodologically, country-level evaluations relate the totality of development and peacebuilding interventions (the 'aid system') to the course of an armed conflict and look for positive and negative interrelations. This shall be achieved by matching the areas and scope of intervention with the root causes and dynamics of the conflict as well as the motivations of its main actors.

Conflict-sensitive methodologies for monitoring and evaluating individual projects have mainly been developed in the area of peacebuilding, that is for projects with explicit conflict prevention and peacebuilding objectives. Their main purposes are oversight and institutional learning. As peacebuilding is still a new area for most development and humanitarian organisations, there is a great interest in learning about good practice in

terms of types of initiatives, processes and conditions, which are likely to contribute to peacebuilding. Therefore, a number of donors have conducted evaluations of projects funded by their peacebuilding funds or budget lines (e.g. SIDA 2000, CIDA 2001). Others asked for reviews of successful initiatives by other agencies in order to learn the lessons for their own work (e.g. Lund *et al.* 2001 for USAID). At the same time, the community of peacebuilding NGOs has launched a series of efforts to evaluate and enhance their own practice (e.g. van Tongeren/Galama 2002, INCORE 2001). More work is still required to adapt these approaches to assess the conflict impact of conventional development and humanitarian assistance projects.

Evaluations of peacebuilding projects have focused on two issues: process and impact. The first group of evaluations pay particular attention to the peacebuilding quality of the project planning and implementation process. Thereby, they integrate peacebuilding considerations into traditional evaluation criteria for development projects. The peacebuilding criteria are drawn from the current state of knowledge about what makes good peacebuilding initiatives. Such qualities include a long-term commitment to the conflict, the primacy of those directly affected by the conflict, emphasis on trust and dialogue, flexibility and the willingness to take 'honourable risks'. Based on an analysis of a cross-section of SIDA-funded peacebuilding projects, SIPU *et al.* (2000) suggest the following evaluation criteria, which they adapted from the ALNAP criteria for evaluating humanitarian assistance:

Box 3: Criteria for evaluating the implementation of peacebuilding projects

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Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Proposed criteria for evaluating peacebuilding projects (2000)
- Appropriateness
- Coherence
- Ownership and partnership
- Sustainability
- Gender equality
- Flexibility
- Location of responsibility
- Pressure for success and acceptance of possible failure
- Institutional competence
- Relationships of trust
- Quantitative sub-goals achieved
- Impact

Source: SIPU 2000

The other group of evaluations is mainly interested in the real peacebuilding impact of an intervention. Thereby, they acknowledge that the peace impact is rarely directly measurable, e.g. as a reduction in the levels of violence. The contribution of a peacebuilding initiative is mostly indirect as projects try to affect structural conflict factors, institutions for conflict management or particular vulnerable groups. In this case, the evaluation needs to be able to establish a conceptual link between the issues addressed by the project and the wider conflict context. For this purpose, these PCIA frameworks make use of peace and conflict frameworks, which spell out the key conflict factors and peacebuilding requirements. In practical terms, an impact-oriented PCIA combines an evaluation of the project impact in developmental terms with its contextualisation within a peacebuilding framework. The following methodology was developed by the Belgian

Field Diplomacy Initiative to evaluate the conflict impact of non-peacebuilding projects. Thereby, it situates project objectives and impact within a framework of peacebuilding needs, which is based on an in-depth analysis of the local conflict.

Box 4: Conflict impact assessment at project level

Field Diplomacy Initiative, Steps for conflict impact assessment at project-level (2002)
1. Conflict mapping
    • parties, issues, context;
    • role of the project's sector
2. Project mapping
    • history, problem addressed, activities
    • stakeholders and beneficiaries
3. Impact assessment
    • according to the immediate objectives of the project
4. Peace and conflict impact assessment
    • impact of project on parties, issues and context of the conflict
    • impact of conflict on project
5. Conclusions
6. Recommendations for re-design and future activities

Source: de la Haye 2002

An alternative approach to evaluating mostly smaller peacebuilding initiatives is the 'action evaluation methodology' by Jay Rothman and Marc Ross (Ross/Rothman 1999). It aims to integrate evaluation in the process of conflict resolution and make it consistent with its values and practices. Parts of this self-evaluation process are the joint definition of project goals and activities, the negotiation of a common approach and the formulation of evolving criteria for success, which can modify in the course of the project. The idea is that such a reflective approach to evaluation can help projects to evolve and better respond to external and internal challenges. In the context of development and humanitarian assistance, this approach is probably most fruitful for small initiatives, which employ traditional aid instruments to achieve peacebuilding objectives.

Methodological Challenges

We have seen that there is now a range of tools available for conflict-sensitive planning, monitoring and evaluating development and humanitarian aid. They serve a variety of purposes (e.g. long-term strategic review, short-term crisis monitoring and management, sector programming, project planning, participatory project review) and use different analytical frameworks and research methods. In this section, I will highlight some of the principal challenges to be addressed in the further development of these tools.

Comparability

The pluralism of conflict-sensitive analytical tools raises the question of how far it is possible to achieve a certain degree of standardisation and comparability of the results they provide. Asked differently, are there 'objective' general criteria, which can be used to analyse conflict and develop peacebuilding strategies? Such comparability is not only of academic interest, but would also support agencies in setting priorities, achieve better co-ordination and apply the lessons learned. The issue of a general analytical framework has been one of the central concerns of an expert discussion on Peace and Conflict Impact

Assessment initiated by the Berghof Center for Constructive Conflict Management (Berlin). There are strong arguments on both sides.

Mark Hoffman (2001) challenges the inability of many existing approaches evaluating the peacebuilding impact of development and humanitarian aid to formulate a convincing set of 'usable criteria and indicators' for conflict and impact analysis and even more to link them to an overall framework for peacebuilding action. He argues that an over-reliance on individual contexts to shape methodology reduces its overall analytical value. This call is echoed by Michael Lund (2002), who notes the great variety and lack of systematisation of PCIA regarding:

- analytical frameworks and impact criteria
- units, levels and kinds of intervention being analysed
- particular national and local conflict contexts
- data sources and processes of data gathering.

From an evaluation practitioner's perspective, he particularly deplores the lack of agreement on impact criteria and standards for data quality as well as the incompatibility of many studies for their focus on very different types and levels of development and peacebuilding interventions. This is also an issue for aid organisations seeking clear standards for priority setting and monitoring the quality of their projects.

Beyond the variety of formats and applications required by the agencies, there are three principal reasons, why standardisation has been difficult or even impossible. The first and most frequently invoked reason is the importance of context. Some scholars (e.g. Rothman 2001) feel that it is counterproductive to impose "pre-cooked" sets of indicators and frameworks on a variety of conflict situations. Such indicators are either unable to capture the whole complexity of the local situation or outrightly inappropriate. They also reflect the priorities of outsiders, not those of the actual stakeholders of the conflict.

The second reason is that of the different conflict models, which underlie the PCIA methodologies. Few methodologies are as explicit as DFID's Conflict Assessment tool (2002), which acknowledges its roots in a political economy approach. Other methodologies work with implicit theories about the root causes of conflict, the stages and factors of conflict escalation, the determining factors of political instability and state collapse, or the necessary ingredients of a successful problem-solving process. Each of these models may lead to a different evaluation of a given situation.

The third factor consists in the intangible nature of the processes being looked at. Conflict analysis entails more than just measuring the intensity of violence. Despite some considerable efforts such as the PIOOM lists of conflict indicators, there is still little agreement on workable indicators for assessing the (in)capacity of state institutions to manage social conflicts, describe processes of mounting discontent, or judge the actual depth of reconciliation. An added difficulty of conflict monitoring is that in the context of conflict, timeframes for analysis tend to be either very short or very long term. Sometimes, a key incident sparks a rapid chain of events, while in other situations conflicts build up, last or cease over long periods of time.

Scope of Analysis and Explanatory Value

Analytically, there is still a conspicuous gap between methodologies for country-level conflict analysis looking at broad policy issues and those designed for project and community-level analysis and impact assessment, which mainly focus on the operational

aspects of aid. Few frameworks have been successful in integrating micro, meso and macro level analysis or linking interventions in distinct sectors (Hoffman 2001). For this reason, it seems, conflict-sensitive tools have also eschewed the issue of how far aid policies and aid delivery contribute to the conflict in a more fundamental sense (e.g. by reducing government capacity). They are neither particularly good at helping practitioners develop a more acute sense of the limits of development and humanitarian assistance to affect the conflict at all.

From their practical experience of supporting long-term development processes in conflict environments Gsänger/Feyen (2001) conclude that agencies do not only want to know WHAT is happening, but also WHY: 'Rather than quantitative measurements, we need explanatory information on impacts. We must understand the processes that have led to positive and negative, intended and unintended impacts' (p.7). They argue that it is this insight into the underlying dynamics of conflict, which allows agencies to learn from past experience and develop future peacebuilding opportunities.

An explanatory approach to conflict-sensitive aid practice goes beyond simple cause-effect relationships as suggested by the Logframe. It requires deeper inquiry into the complex linkages between a range of factors, which is better captured in 'thick' narrative accounts (Hoffman 2001:7) than in tables of indicators. Methodologically, this means a shift from descriptive indicator-based conflict and impact analysis to more explanatory qualitative and process-oriented approaches. Such approaches tend to consist of a general framework for data collection, stakeholder engagement and analysis, but limit themselves to direct the conflict analysis to some general areas, actors and issues (e.g. Nyheim/ Leonhardt/Gaigals 2001). They have the advantage of openness and flexibility, but also place high demands on participants' background knowledge and analytical capacity.

In this context, Ross (2001) warns of complex peacebuilding frameworks and apparently comprehensive lists of indicators. They set unrealistic standards of perfection, which are ultimately disheartening for all participants. Instead, he calls for realism in assessing what is possible under the given local circumstances and finding out the positive things that can be done: 'Good outcomes are often far from ideal ones'.

Multiple Perspectives and Values

If conflict-sensitive analytical tools are to gain acceptance beyond a relatively narrow circle of Western donors and NGOs, a critical issue is that of the values and assumptions they carry. As we have seen above, a certain understanding of peace and conflict is a central part of every methodology. Such an implicit or explicit peacebuilding framework leads the conflict analysis into particular directions, offers explanatory models and guides strategy development. Conflict analysis is not neutral; it always reflects certain values and theories about the nature of conflict, and thus raises question of power and representation. How can these tools incorporate the perspectives and priorities of their principal stakeholders, most importantly those directly affected by the conflict?

So far, both inductive and deductive approaches are used for developing peacebuilding frameworks. Many evaluations operate with general frameworks derived from theoretical conflict models (e.g. root causes or state failure approach), which they adapt to local conditions. Most of these frameworks with their emphasis on democratic institutions, balance of powers and just, but free economic structures reflect the priorities current liberal thinking. The European Commission Checklist of Root Causes of Conflict (Box 1) provides a good example of such a framework. General frameworks such as this have

the advantage that they are quite accessible for non-specialists, for which they can provide some broad orientation. Their value, however, is limited for more in-depth assessments as they lack sensitivity to the local context. Such as in this example, many presume that e.g. the presence of a well-organised and 'vibrant' civil society pe*r se* already enhances the chances of peaceful conflict management. This statement does not take into account that civil societies in their Western sense simply do not exist in many parts of the non-western worlds or that they are not necessarily champions of peace.

For this reason, other PCIA approaches attempt to derive a peacebuilding framework from the previous assessment of the local conflict situation (e.g. FDI). This undoubtedly leads to results, which are closer to local realities, while it also requires more investment in terms of staff capacity and time. Yet also deductive approaches largely seem to reproduce the viewpoints of the international experts and yield rather standardised results. Such frameworks risk imposing certain notions of peace, which may not correspond to local people's aspirations.

One of the major challenges for conflict analysis and impact assessment tools is finding a way to have a more participatory PCIA at the meso and macro levels.

A more participatory PCIA, therefore, must find ways to include and represent the peacebuilding perspectives of various stakeholder groups into the assessment process. In Marc Ross' (2001) view, this can be achieved by paying equal attention to the theories or rationales for action of all stakeholders to a peace initiative. Thereby, the academic conflict models used by activists or outside agencies are as valuable as those concepts used by ordinary people to make sense of their environment. All participants should have the chance to articulate their assumptions about the conflict, even if they are sometimes at odds, and jointly negotiate goals and indicators. While contradictions, disagreement and trade-offs are inevitable, the assessment process itself is empowering as it allows stakeholders to better understand certain courses of action. In this sense, there are no 'right' or 'wrong' theories or peacebuilding frameworks, the important thing is to be explicit about them.

While this approach seems feasible for small-scale initiatives with a high degree of control of local stakeholders, it seems more difficult to realise in larger settings. One of the major challenges for conflict analysis and impact assessment tools is finding a way to have a more participatory PCIA at the meso and macro levels.

How Can Analytical Tools Contribute to Conflict-sensitive Development and Humanitarian Practice?

While a lot of attention has been focussed on the methodological aspects of conflict analysis and impact assessment, we still know relatively little about how these tools can actually enhance the work of development and humanitarian organisations in areas affected by conflict. The empirical basis to answer this question is still narrow. To my knowledge, no aid agency has yet systematically integrated conflict-sensitive tools into its entire programming cycle. Most applications have been of a pilot character, benefiting from headquarter support and dedicated funds for the necessary research and

consultations. Nevertheless, there are some clear trends.

Tools Do Not Work for All Organisations

First of all, it is useful to note that so far only a relatively small number of aid agencies actually uses or plans to use conflict-sensitive analytical tools. They mainly belong to a group of 'like-minded' bilateral donors, multinational organisations and international NGOs, which have a track-record of agenda setting and early innovation. There is a conspicuous absence of smaller, resource-poor NGOs, particularly those based in countries affected by violent conflict (see Table 1). Apart from the interest they garner in being perceived as 'progressive', analytical tools seem to work better for larger, bureaucratic organisations with heavier structures and the funds necessary for systematic analysis.

Smaller organisations also analyse conflict and look for the impact of their work, but they tend to do this in less structured ways. Because of their small size, communication channels are shorter, reporting systems can remain simple, and more analysis and evaluation takes place informally. For such an organisation, a standardised tool for conflict analysis and impact assessment may appear too cumbersome, too expensive and too blunt a way to understand the reality within which they are working. For this reason, (southern) NGOs regard the request of some donors to include a conflict impact assessment statement in their funding proposals with some reserve. Badly managed, this could become a mechanism to concentrate funding on a small number of larger (northern) NGOs with the necessary capacity to comply with complex funding regulations.

The following observations then, mainly apply to the larger organisations which are currently using conflict-sensitive tools.

Facilitating Analysis and Communication

Tools have proven useful in providing a framework for conflict or impact analysis and guiding the research process. Well managed, they can provide a framework for stakeholder consultation and participation, which enhances the quality of information and ownership of the analysis. Observers have noticed (Goodhand 2001), however, that agencies should not regard analytical tools as a replacement for sound regional knowledge or even restrain creative analysis. Their strength rather lies in helping aid practitioners to 'tap into' this expert knowledge and make best use of it for their purposes.

Beyond the analysis itself, organisations using conflict-sensitive tools have found that their application has an important effect on conflict awareness and communication among staff. Many regional or sectoral staff remarked that participating in a conflict analysis exercise helped them deepen their understanding of the issues in the country or sector they were working on. Working with a tool also provides staff with a 'safe space' to exchange information on the conflict and discuss possible responses to it. Many have found this liberating and enlightening, particularly as previously violent conflict was a taboo issue for many agencies. Fearing for contracts or political trouble, they had either decided that it was not relevant for their work or a threat to their operations. Particularly field staff suffered from this situation, since it limited their chances to communicate important issues to desk officers and decision-makers in their headquarters.

Enhancing Accountable Decision-Making

Conflict-sensitive tools can enhance the accountability of an organisation towards its beneficiaries and funders, particularly if they spell out a framework for decision-making. Such a framework may specify values or criteria, which make decisions more transparent to the public. The actual impact of the information provided by the tools may be rather limited, however. It is likely to be most significant in relation to operational issues, on which the project management and other stakeholders have a relatively large degree of control. At higher political levels, tools at best seem to play a role in drawing the attention of decision-makers to certain issues. Yet they are unlikely to have a significant impact on the content of the decisions taken as too many other considerations come into play. Development organisations, for example, find it difficult to change a historically grown programme portfolio because of the long-term commitments made to partner organisations, staff and beneficiaries. What would make most sense from a peacebuilding perspective is often not immediate national priority or agency interest. One does hope, however, that a sound assessment of the conflict situation encourages policy makers and aid organisations to take the long-term view and take more significant steps to work towards peace and justice. Otherwise, using tools runs the danger of creating expectations in the field, which are later not fulfilled.

Mainstreaming Conflict-Sensitive Practice

Tools seem to be an important element of mainstreaming conflict-sensitive practice. The rationale is that they provide non-specialist staff with the necessary skills to integrate a conflict perspective into their areas of responsibility (Landgraf 2000:114). There are also arguments for making conflict analysis and impact assessment obligatory, at least when policies and programmes with a high risk of aggravating the conflict are planned. In this case, staff would be required to justify their decisions in relation to their potential impact on the conflict and, where negative effects are expected, consider alternative options or mitigating measures. World Bank social assessments are one relevant model for such a procedure. It would allow an organisation to maintain better oversight of its operations and find better solutions in individual cases. At a strategic level, (obligatory) tools are a way to institutionalise conflict within the organisation. A similar purpose has the creation of specialised conflict units or decentralised conflict advisors. The reason for this is that multiplicity of demands within an agency quickly leads to the disappearance of all those "weaker" issues, which do not have an institutional focus within the organisation.

Experience with gender and environmental impact assessments have shown, however, that such a bureaucratic approach to mainstreaming produces moderate results in terms of enhanced sensitivity to the subject. Overburdened desk officers are likely to perceive the tools as an additional bureaucratic requirement and just "tick them off". Methodologically, mainstreamed PCIA tools have the disadvantage that they need to be rather superficial to remain manageable at all (the famous 'one-page donor checklist', which so often makes activists smile). Such a brief tool may still be useful as an instrument of control, but its value added in terms of knowledge and analysis is limited, what may further decrease staff commitment. For these reasons, most agencies have yet shunned away from introducing obligatory conflict-sensitive tools for their programmes and projects. More promising results have been achieved with offering tools as an option and advising policy makers and desk officers on when best to use it. This allows for a

more targeted use. Conducted on a voluntary base in close co-operation between the regional departments and the conflict unit, any recommendations have the ownership of both sides and are more likely to be followed up.

Where to Go for PCIA?

As now more and more agencies are developing, mainstreaming and applying conflict analysis and impact assessment tools, it is time to step back and review the field critically. What have we learned about them?

First, most practitioners concur that we are still far away from having a generally applicable methodology or even indicators for socio-political analysis and impact assessment in the context of conflict. This requires modesty regarding the predictive capacity of available methodologies and their ability to demonstrate impact. When introducing conflict-sensitive tools, it is therefore important not to promise too much and raise false expectations among non-specialists. The available tools are certainly good enough, however, to highlight alarming developments, which should trigger response.

Second, tools need to fit into an organisation's culture if they are to promote conflict-sensitive practice. A development or humanitarian organisation is an integrated whole with a specific history, mandate, values, staff composition and ways of working. For some agencies, tools can play a useful role in enhancing analytical skills and facilitating communication on conflict issues. Yet changing just one screw in the complex machinery of an aid administration will not work. Tools alone cannot make an agency more conflict-sensitive. This requires appropriate organisational structures, qualified staff, and — above all — an organisational commitment to supporting just peace.

Lastly, we need to work harder to realise the critical and empowering potential of conflict analysis and impact assessment. Today, tools are mostly used for top-down planning, management and control processes that are still common to most types of international assistance. In such a context, we cannot expect revolutionising insights even from the most participatory and critical instrument. Yet many possibilities still remain unexplored. CROSS More could be done to hand over analytical tools to civil society organisations, particularly those from the South, as a part of capacity building in management and advocacy. CROSS We do need more independent voices, which critically accompany the policies and practices of their own governments, as well as those of donors in terms of their impact on conflict. We also need more channels for communicating these messages and ways of making them reverberate in policy-making circles. Tools are just a first step in this direction.

Abbreviations

ALNAP	Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Assistance, UK
ARIA	Action Research Initiative, United States
BMZ	Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development, Germany
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CPN	Conflict Prevention Network (European Commission think tank)
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DfID	Department for International Affairs, UK

EU	European Union
GTZ	German Association for Technical Co-operation
FDI	Field Diplomacy Initiative, Belgium
IEPADES	Instituto de Enseñanza para el Desarrollo Sostenible, Guatemala
INCORE	International Conflict Research, Ulster University, Northern Ireland
LCPP	Local Capacities for Peace Project, United States
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PIOOM	Leiden University, The Netherlands
RTC	Responding to Conflict, UK
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development Co-operation
SIDA	Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank

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