

## In brief

- This Network Paper maps the current state of conflict-sensitive practice in emergencies, identifying good practice which can be built upon, key gaps and ways to integrate conflict sensitivity more strategically across the emergency programme cycle.
- The research reveals widespread understanding of and support for better integration of the principles of conflict sensitivity in humanitarian response. The chief obstacle lies in the practical application of these principles, taking into account the constraints and multiple demands faced by aid agencies in responding to emergencies.
- Minimum Standards suggested by this paper give practical guidance on ways to integrate conflict sensitivity across the humanitarian programme cycle (Preparedness, Assessment, Design, Implementation and Evaluation)
- Significant improvements in the quality and relevance of humanitarian response can be achieved through relatively simple steps which complement existing tools, standards and on-going emergency capacity-building initiatives. A commitment to integrate conflict sensitivity would not only help minimize harm and reduce conflict risks but also increase the overall effectiveness of aid interventions.

## About HPN

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# Network Paper

## Applying conflict sensitivity in emergency response

Current practice and ways forward

Commissioned and published by the Humanitarian Practice Network at ODI

**Nona Zicherman, with Aimal Khan, Anne Street, Heloise Heyer and Oliver Chevreau**



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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Since the introduction of the Do No Harm framework more than ten years ago, the humanitarian sector has invested in a range of initiatives to address programme quality and accountability. Do No Harm was based on the realisation that ‘when international assistance is given in the context of a violent conflict, it becomes a part of that context and thus also of the conflict. Although aid agencies often seek to be neutral or nonpartisan toward the winners and losers of a war, the impact of their aid is not neutral regarding whether conflict worsens or abates’.<sup>1</sup> Aid agencies have sought to mitigate the specific challenges posed by conflict settings in terms of civilian protection, security and risk management, and the constraints on agency access. Notwithstanding these efforts, understanding and applying a wider approach to conflict sensitivity in humanitarian response remains problematic. The complexity of the contexts in which emergencies occur, and the speed with which organisations need to react, often leave little opportunity for the use of sophisticated analytical tools or other approaches that might be feasible during a long-term development programme. Nonetheless, aid practitioners are acutely aware of the potential for aid to exacerbate conflict, and are keen to find practical ways to mitigate these risks.

The term ‘conflict sensitivity’ is defined as the ability of an organisation to:

- understand the context in which it operates;
- understand the interaction between its intervention and the context; and
- act upon this understanding in order to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on conflict.

This paper uses the definition of ‘conflict’ articulated by the UK Department for International Development (DFID):

*Conflict exists in all societies at all times and need not necessarily be negative or destructive. Conflict is the pursuit of contrary or seemingly incompatible interests – whether between individuals, groups or countries. It can be a major force for positive social change. In states with good governance, strong civil society and robust political and social systems where human rights are protected, conflicting interests are managed and ways found for groups to pursue their goals peacefully. Where there is poor governance, however, grievances, disillusionment, competition for resources and disputes are more likely to become violent.<sup>2</sup>*

While large-scale armed conflicts tend to be most visible internationally, this paper also focuses on smaller-scale local or community-based conflicts, which have the potential to escalate into violence and blight the lives of those caught in them.

Using an analysis of existing agency tools and standards and case studies of three recent emergencies, as well as extensive consultations with humanitarian professionals in headquarters and field offices, this paper explores whether and how conflict-sensitive approaches (CSA) are currently being applied, explicitly or implicitly, in rapid-onset emergencies. It maps the current state of conflict-sensitive practice in emergencies, identifying good practice where it exists and highlighting ways to more strategically integrate conflict sensitivity across the emergency programme cycle. It is intended to provide guidance for humanitarian programme coordinators and management at a country level, as well as for humanitarian department advisors in NGO and donor headquarters.

Specifically, the paper identifies conflict flashpoints common to the activities of first-phase emergency responses; identifies how programme and surge capacity staff currently apply conflict sensitivity in the context of rapid-onset emergencies, through an assessment of the tools and standards they use and insights into responses to the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the Pakistan floods in 2010 and floods in Sri Lanka in 2010/2011; maps key conflict-sensitivity challenges faced by aid agencies; and draws out conclusions and practical recommendations to strengthen the use of conflict-sensitive approaches in future humanitarian emergencies. The paper also addresses opportunities for synergy with Sphere and other key standards and guidelines used widely in the humanitarian sector.

This research used qualitative and quantitative methods to triangulate findings and develop conclusions and recommendations. The methodology included a review of documents from five aid agencies as well as sector-wide guidance and standards. Key informant interviews were conducted with staff members working in senior management, advisory and humanitarian surge capacity functions, complemented by a broader survey of humanitarian professionals. Short periods of field research were undertaken in each case study country, involving consultations with over 50 individuals through focus groups, individual interviews with NGO staff, local government officials and donors, visits to project sites and discussions with partners, crisis-affected people and other stakeholders. The three case studies explore common challenges relevant to conflict-sensitive practice in emergencies and, where agencies were able to find solutions, provide examples of good practice in conflict risk mitigation.

This study reveals good understanding of and support for a better integration of conflict sensitivity in humanitarian response. Existing emergency programme guidance and sector-wide tools are relevant to conflict-sensitivity in emergencies and can be built upon; there is no need to start from scratch. However, there are significant shortcomings

in the practical application of conflict-sensitive approaches in recent large-scale emergency responses, linked to a lack of widespread and appropriate mainstreaming of conflict sensitivity tools. A key gap is the lack of integration of conflict analysis tools in emergency manuals. While this review found many examples of implicitly conflict-sensitive practice, where staff members took measures to better understand the conflict context and tried to ‘do no harm’ with the assistance they were providing, stakeholders emphasised that, since such initiatives are not part of a formal mainstreaming process, they are currently almost entirely dependent on the knowledge, experience and commitment of individual staff.

In recognising that ‘keeping things simple’ is often the key to success for practitioners, there is certainly a danger of over-formalising CSA in emergency initiatives. Rather, we should support ‘doing no harm’ as an institutional value by building on the many existing examples of implicitly conflict-sensitive practice. At the same time, agencies need to commit to undertaking explicit mainstreaming of conflict-sensitive approaches so as to measure, track and institutionalise good practice, and ensure that adherence to minimum standards of conflict sensitivity in emergencies is not dependent only on the commitment and experience of individual staff members.

## Chapter 2

### Existing tools, standards and approaches

This chapter assesses the extent to which conflict-sensitive approaches are currently addressed within existing emergency response guidance and integrated into sector standards and approaches. It looks at internal documents (humanitarian strategy documents and emergency manuals or handbooks) from five members of the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, ActionAid International, CAFOD, CARE International, Plan International and World Vision International. It also examines shared standards and tools commonly used by the humanitarian sector, such as Sphere, and investigates staff perceptions of conflict-sensitivity mainstreaming in humanitarian programmes. The purpose of this analysis is three-fold:

- To measure the degree to which agency commitments to conflict-sensitivity mainstreaming have already been translated into actual programme guidance.
- To find out whether agencies are already ‘doing’ conflict sensitivity, but calling it by another name.
- To identify where conflict-sensitive practice can be strengthened by reinforcing existing tools, standards and processes, rather than through the introduction of additional initiatives.

#### Emergency guidelines

All of the internal emergency manuals reviewed (of those agencies that already have such documents in place) included tools that can be used to reinforce the conflict sensitivity of emergency response work. ActionAid has a series of programme tools and methodologies, including a Participatory Conflict Vulnerability Analysis (PCVA) framework, a Conflict Response Programming Framework and a Conflict Sensitivity Framework; CARE International’s *Emergency Pocketbook* and online emergency toolkit include the Benefit–Harms Analysis (BHA) framework, a *Quick Guide to Good Enough Conflict Analysis* and a detailed conflict assessment questionnaire; and World Vision uses Local Capacities for Peace (LCP, an adaptation of the Do No Harm framework developed by Mary Anderson) to analyse the interaction between conflict and project activities at the micro-level, and is using a tool for more macro-level context and conflict analysis (called Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts (MSTC)).

In addition to these explicitly conflict-sensitive approaches, agencies implicitly make their responses more conflict-sensitive through other kinds of tools and processes across the programme cycle, from preparedness and assessment to design, implementation and targeting.<sup>3</sup>

#### Preparedness

Contingency planning and other disaster preparedness measures would be an obvious place to integrate conflict analysis as plans are normally developed based on an

analysis of the context and risk factors, as well as vulnerability to disaster, in any given country. Possible entry-points include the participatory vulnerability analyses used by development programmes to generate country strategies and disaster risk reduction strategies, and including conflict assessments within emergency preparedness plans. Where capacity audits are used to assess the internal capacity of a country office to implement an emergency response, it may be possible to include knowledge of conflict sensitivity or the capacity to do context analysis as part of the assessment.

#### Assessment

Assessment is a key phase in humanitarian response. First-phase assessments are often done under enormous time pressure and logistical and security constraints, but they are critical in determining initial target groups and locations as well as types of interventions. Normally, quick and often multi-sectoral assessment tools are used at the beginning of an emergency to enable rapid response, and more in-depth and complex assessments are undertaken several weeks later to see if adjustments are needed.

Three of the five agencies examined had assessment tools that included implicitly conflict-sensitive aspects. For instance, one agency’s rapid assessment tool includes questions on whether the particular characteristics of the affected population carry with them any political implications, and cautions users to look at how power relations can inform, and potentially bias, appraisal results. Another uses a short checklist of four questions to identify whether there is a need for further Do No Harm or macro-conflict analysis, and has a ‘red flag’ system to indicate to field teams when they need to seek assistance from technical conflict advisors in the organisation. Questions on conflict tend to be included mostly as part of the recovery phase (generally at least four weeks from the beginning of the emergency) rather than as part of the initial assessment, even for those agencies that use implicitly conflict-sensitive assessment tools.

#### Design and implementation

Good design practices in the agencies reviewed include the inclusion of suggested activities for conflict risk reduction within programming templates and the inclusion of an ‘operational checklist’ for implementing conflict analysis during the design phase as an appendix to an agency’s emergency toolkit. A particular challenge however is the difficulty of operationalising such components for staff who are not already extensively familiar with those methodologies, such as surge capacity staff hired by agencies in the case of large-scale emergencies.

#### Targeting and distribution

Targeting and distribution, particularly food distributions, are typically areas of programme design and implemen-

tation particularly prone to conflict or tensions. Distribution exit monitoring and post-distribution monitoring is good conflict-sensitive practice, although in conflict-affected settings questionnaires could include questions which address conflict risks caused by distributions more explicitly. Post-distribution monitoring questions often tend to focus on the individual beneficiary, whereas from a conflict sensitivity point of view more information is needed on the impact of the distribution at the household and community level.

### Support functions

Support functions are critical in delivering emergency responses. Human Resources and Logistics/Procurement can benefit from exposure to conflict-sensitive approaches, notably through tailored training, as they have a significant influence on the way the agency interacts with its context. None of the agencies whose tools and guidance were reviewed explicitly addressed conflict sensitivity in support functions. However, a human resources good practice that could be built on from a CSA perspective involves using orientation checklists to help emergency staff understand the local context.

## Monitoring, evaluation and accountability

All of the agencies reviewed articulate a clear commitment to accountability to beneficiaries in their emergency documents. If this commitment is manifested at field level it should certainly make responses more conflict-sensitive as complaints mechanisms, public hearings, social audits, community reviews and other participatory monitoring tools can help reveal any conflict issues associated with programme implementation, and should give field teams a chance to adjust their activities accordingly. These accountability mechanisms need to be implemented in a way that is sensitive to any underlying power or conflict dynamics that might influence the feedback coming from beneficiaries, and so require a certain level of conflict sensitivity capacity among staff using them.

Emergency manuals from the agencies reviewed were generally weaker on impact monitoring tools overall, and did not include ways to measure the two-way relationship between the response and its context, particularly when it comes to conflict. Many agencies are currently using some form of Real-Time Evaluation (RTE), a methodology initially adapted to humanitarian contexts by UNHCR. RTEs contain standardised benchmarks to be measured one to three months into an emergency response. RTEs are different from post-facto evaluations, as they are intended to provide an opportunity for managers to step back and reflect while implementation is ongoing, so that problems can be addressed during the life of the programme. CARE systematically conducts After Action Reviews (AARs) 3–4 months after an emergency response. Adding a conflict benchmark to such evaluations and reviews in fragile contexts would enable humanitarian evaluations to take conflict dynamics into consideration.

### Box 1

#### Sector-wide accountability standards

The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) Standard for Humanitarian Accountability helps humanitarian organisations to ‘design, implement, assess, improve and recognise’ accountable programmes, and includes a voluntary certification process for local and international agencies. The Good Enough Guide to Impact, Monitoring and Accountability was developed as part of the Gates Foundation-funded Emergency Capacity Building project. It provides simple ways to help emergency practitioners measure impact and ensure accountability to beneficiaries.

While neither of these initiatives explicitly addresses the issue of operating in conflict-prone environments, both could contribute to enhancing the conflict sensitivity of humanitarian programmes. The Good Enough Guide provides practical ways to track changes throughout the life of a programme via two-way feedback between the agency and beneficiaries, and emphasises the importance of using that feedback to improve project impact. This approach could certainly be used for monitoring the impact of conflict on a programme and vice versa, but would be more effective if additional questions specifically addressing conflict issues were integrated into these monitoring systems. HAP has a set of principles which HAP-certified agencies follow and report on in dealing with beneficiaries, including participation and informed consent, duty of care, transparency and offering redress. These principles have the potential to greatly reduce the kinds of conflict often caused by a lack of communication and misunderstanding between beneficiaries and project teams.

## Sphere

The Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Standards are one of the most influential inter-agency tools developed by the humanitarian sector. The core and technical standards in particular are well-known and frequently referenced by frontline staff during the design and implementation of programmes in the field. While Sphere and the other sector-wide standards and principles do not explicitly address conflict sensitivity, they are extremely relevant as a way to link conflict-sensitive approaches to humanitarian action more widely. The core principle of neutral and independent humanitarian action is familiar and cherished by humanitarian workers, and acting based on a strong understanding of the conflict contexts in which they work is clearly one way to ensure that this principle is being followed.

### The Humanitarian Charter

The Sphere Humanitarian Charter draws heavily on the NGO/Red Cross Code of Conduct to lay out guiding principles for the independence, effectiveness and impact of humanitarian



action. Both the Charter and the Code of Conduct emphasise the primacy of the humanitarian imperative<sup>4</sup> and insist on the independence and impartiality<sup>5</sup> of humanitarian actors, who must deliver aid based on need alone without any discrimination based on gender, race and ethnicity or political or religious affiliation.

While the term ‘conflict sensitive’ does not appear in Sphere, the Charter does specifically recognise that ‘attempts to provide humanitarian assistance may sometimes have unintended adverse effects’, and that organisations that abide by the Charter must ‘aim to minimise any negative effects of humanitarian action on the local community or on the environment’. Situations of armed conflict are deemed particularly challenging, and it is recognised that ‘the way in which humanitarian assistance is provided may potentially render civilians more vulnerable to attack, or may on occasion bring unintended advantage to one or more of the parties to the conflict’. Parties to the Charter are ‘committed to minimising any such adverse effects’. The Sphere approach is to introduce shared standards as measured by commonly-agreed indicators and then leave it up to each agency to decide how they achieve those standards. In practice this means that staff and partners trained in Sphere will be introduced to this concept of unintended consequences and the potentially adverse effects of aid, which will increase their awareness of the need for conflict sensitivity, but their own agencies have to provide complementary tools to enable them to recognise and react to any adverse effects.

### The Sphere Standards

Sphere puts the principles of the Humanitarian Charter into practice via the Core and Technical standards. The Core Standards are meant to be applied in a cross-cutting way in any response programme, and include a number of conflict-sensitive aspects. Core Standard 1, People Centred Humanitarian Response, focuses on feedback mechanisms to ensure accountability to disaster-affected people. Core Standard 3, Assessment, encourages teams to ‘find and use pre-disaster information about local humanitarian capacity, the affected and wider population, context and other pre-existing factors that may increase people’s susceptibility to the disaster’, and to ‘assess current and potential safety concerns for the disaster-affected population and aid workers, including the potential for the response to exacerbate a conflict or create tension between the affected and host populations’. Core Standard 4, Design and Response, requires that programmes be designed to ‘minimise the risk of endangering people, worsen the dynamics of a conflict or create insecurity or opportunities for exploitation and abuse’. Finally, Core Standard 5, Performance, Transparency and Learning, includes a guidance note on impact monitoring which encourages agencies to assess the wider effects of ‘particular humanitarian contributions to changes in populations and the context’, links that are essential for conflict-sensitive monitoring and evaluation.

The technical standards contain information on the relationship between activities and context, though this

### Box 2

#### Conflict sensitivity within the Sphere Standard for Food Distribution

‘In situations of armed conflict or general insecurity, there is a danger of food being looted or requisitioned by warring parties ... Measures should be taken not only to ensure the integrity of the supply chain but also to analyse and address broader political and security implications, such as the possibility of diverted stocks fuelling an armed conflict ... The selection of agents involved in targeting should be based on their impartiality, capacity and accountability ... Targeting approaches need to be clear and accepted by both recipient and non-recipient populations to avoid creating tensions and doing harm.’

The Sphere Project, *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*, 2011, pp. 191 and 193.

varies between them. The Food Security and Nutrition Minimum Standard says that ‘targeting, delivery and distribution methods should reduce the risk of inclusion and exclusion errors’, including ‘the risk that food, cash or other assistance is misappropriated by combatants. It is important that food security interventions are not diverted to worsen conflicts’. The standard emphasises the importance of measuring and sharing knowledge of the effects of food security responses on the local economy, social networks, livelihoods and the natural environment. The livelihoods section also pays a great deal of attention to the interaction between project activities and context, and emphasises the need for proper contextual understanding to, for example, avoid conflicts over natural resources when introducing inputs or other assistance to increase agricultural production. The food aid section provides detailed guidance on how to avoid creating tension and doing harm during targeting and distribution processes.

The Shelter Minimum Standard addresses housing, land and property rights, which are a common source of conflict during humanitarian response. It requires the identification of ownership of land, housing or other buildings for non-displaced and displaced populations, including the holders of both formal and customary use rights. The standard recognises that these issues are often controversial, and highlights the fact that the provision of shelter assistance may also be perceived as legitimising land title claims.

### Humanitarian protection

Another overlap between Sphere and conflict-sensitive approaches is in the area of humanitarian protection. Protection has been defined as any action which ‘aims to ensure that authorities and other actors respect their obligations and the rights of individuals in order to

preserve the safety, physical integrity and dignity of those affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence'.<sup>6</sup> Depending on the mandate or expertise of the organisation, protection interventions in the humanitarian sector can include 'responsive' action, which operates directly at the point of abuse to stop, prevent or alleviate its worst effects; 'remedial' action, which assists and supports people recovering after violations; and 'environment-building' action, which is concerned with moving society as a whole towards political, social, cultural and institutional norms which will prevent or limit current and future violations.<sup>7</sup> Over the past few years many humanitarian agencies have begun to focus on building their capacity in one or more of these modes of action, and have introduced new policies, tools and training programmes.

The 2011 Sphere revision responded to this trend by introducing a set of Protection Principles to guide agencies' work in this sector. The first principle, 'Do No Harm', requires agencies involved in humanitarian response to do 'all they reasonably can to avoid exposing people affected by disaster or armed conflict to further harm, for example by building settlements for displaced people in unsafe areas'. The guidance notes for this principle provide a checklist of questions which in practice would allow field workers to recognise and prevent or remedy the potentially negative effects of their actions on beneficiaries. Principle 2, 'Ensure people's access to impartial assistance – in proportion to need and without discrimination', emphasises continuous monitoring of humanitarian access and the need to avoid targeting only one particular group. This too is particularly relevant to the implementation of conflict-sensitive approaches in the field.

While the kind of analysis required to develop protection strategies and programmes would certainly provide ample information to feed a conflict context analysis, humanitarian protection and conflict sensitivity are not a perfect match. The sector has struggled to successfully mainstream protection, perhaps due to confusion on exactly what the term implies. Additionally, human rights-influenced protection frameworks generally have a focus on 'victims' and 'perpetrators', language that may in itself pose conflict-sensitivity challenges if not handled with careful consideration of the context.

## Perceptions of conflict-sensitivity mainstreaming in humanitarian programmes

### Awareness of conflict sensitivity

Interviews with key informants revealed widespread acceptance of and enthusiasm for the concept of conflict sensitivity among staff at all levels. This was reinforced by a 12-question survey of humanitarian professionals distributed via humanitarian networks, which found that 84% of humanitarian practitioners thought it should be 'a top priority for the sector' to better equip aid workers to be conflict sensitive in emergencies. There also seemed to be little debate as to its relevance in rapid-onset emergencies. Interviewees readily recognised the potential of humanitarian aid to exacerbate existing conflict issues,

### Box 3

#### Is conflict sensitivity relevant to humanitarian response?

'Of course conflict-sensitivity is extremely relevant to humanitarian response! I just got back from Japan, a society we might think of as pretty peaceful. But I can tell you that the aid response to the earthquake and tsunami there is causing conflict – people in the evacuation centres are fighting about why one prefecture is receiving more assistance than another, why certain people are targeted while others are not ... if we can cause these kinds of problems in Japan, imagine what we are doing in societies living with war and ethnic conflict.'

– Senior manager,  
Conflict Sensitivity Consortium member agency

and were easily able to cite examples from their past professional experience. In fact, 85% of those surveyed said that they had been involved with or seen emergency work that inadvertently caused conflict or made existing conflicts worse. Most international staff working for agencies that directly implement humanitarian programmes named 'understanding the context' as one of the top challenges faced by frontline workers during a new emergency response. This was less of an issue for agencies working through partners, as contextual and cultural understanding is one of the main strengths of a partnership approach.

Agency staff expressed an appetite for any approaches or tools that would better equip them to deal with the dilemmas and challenges posed by conflict issues. There was however some debate as to which emergency contexts should prioritise conflict sensitivity as a cross-cutting theme; many practitioners thought it would be more realistic to limit CSA to contexts of recent war or open conflict, whereas many conflict experts would point to the importance of CSA in situations of latent conflict or for deeply divided societies more generally. This debate points to the need for a policy framework to clarify when CSA should apply. For example, the earthquake response in Haiti is considered a natural disaster context, yet conflict-sensitive approaches have been highly relevant.

Interviewees had little experience with emergency interventions that helped reduce conflict or build peace; most staff said that the emergency response programmes they had been involved in did not include peace-building objectives or activities, and few recalled examples of this happening inadvertently. Even for agencies that do have peace-building strategies and programmes, this was seen as something to be considered during the recovery or transition phase at the earliest. Most of the humanitarian staff interviewed did not see active involvement in peace-building as a key part of the response to rapid-onset emergencies, and focused on the more limited aim of minimising the potential harm of the aid effort itself.

### Lack of formal mainstreaming

Despite enthusiasm for the concept, there is little evidence of widespread formal conflict-sensitivity mainstreaming, particularly at field level. As highlighted above, several aid agencies include conflict analysis tools in their emergency handbooks and guidelines, yet there was little evidence that these are being used systematically during responses. Here we should note that agencies are at different phases in the rollout of their emergency handbooks, so they may still be quite unfamiliar to field staff. The fact that conflict analysis tools are not in use may illustrate challenges with the institutionalisation of emergency procedures and guidelines overall, rather than a specific issue with CSA *per se*.

Do No Harm was the only formal CSA tool with which non-specialist staff members were familiar. This may be because it has been around since the 1990s and is hence more widely known than more recent tools. On the positive side, many stakeholders spoke of Do No Harm as an organisational value or principle, demonstrating that there has been some success in mainstreaming the concept. However, upon further discussion it became clear that very few agencies were using the full Do No Harm framework systematically, so the concept is informing programming in a general way rather than being used as an analytical framework to help understand the interaction between specific conflict contexts and emergency response programmes.

#### Box 4

### Implicitly conflict-sensitive practice in South Sudan

‘Working in South Sudan during the war, before any decisions to respond to new emergencies were made, we [senior management] enforced a reflection period where we had a meeting or teleconference (getting people on the line by radio if necessary) and ran through the conflict issues and implications of different response options. For example, if Dinka were moving down into our area, leaving their families behind, then returning to continue fighting, what are the implications of our assistance, we save lives but might fuel the fighting ... The reflection periods were always helpful and empowering for staff – it meant risks were explicitly discussed and there was shared responsibility for the decisions that were made. Plus we got a much richer understanding of choices and consequences through the consultation.’

– Conflict Sensitivity Consortium agency staff member, now working in HQ

### Evidence of implicitly conflict-sensitive practice

There were many examples of ‘implicit’ conflict-sensitive practice, where even without a ‘conflict sensitivity’ label staff members took measures to better understand the context of the conflicts in their project areas and tried to

‘do no harm’ with the assistance they were providing. Such *ad hoc* strategies include:

- Inviting headquarters staff with specific knowledge of certain countries in conflict to sit in on proposal review and project development meetings so that they could identify any possible issues with the impartiality of partners who were submitting proposals and reports (Côte d’Ivoire).
- Initiating detailed discussions about the ethnic and religious identity of staff being sent to certain locations as part of emergency assessment teams (Pakistan/Afghanistan).
- Developing inter-agency codes of conduct, and disseminating them widely in local languages and on radio/cassettes to reach non-literate populations (Sierra Leone).
- Advocacy with donors to widen the beneficiary population in order to avoid causing conflict (Aceh tsunami response).

While these are all positive examples of conflict-sensitive practices, stakeholders emphasised that, since they are not part of a formal mainstreaming process, whether initiatives such as these are implemented is currently very dependent on the knowledge, experience and commitment of the individuals involved.

### The need for strengthened analysis

Key informants recognised the lack of CSA mainstreaming as a weakness, and although they were sensitive to the constraints and competing demands of first-phase emergency response most agreed that it is necessary to address conflict sensitivity more explicitly at the beginning of an emergency in conflict-affected countries. There was a perception that the risks were too high to do absolutely no analysis, particularly in ‘out-of-area’ emergencies, which require agency staff and partners to scale up quickly in an unfamiliar environment and without any pre-existing programmes or connections to local authorities or communities. At the same time, many agencies work through local partners already operational in disaster-affected areas. ‘Good Enough’ approaches to conflict analysis (rapid, simple, focusing on key questions) were seen to be the most relevant in the immediate post-disaster phase. Most informants pointed to the ‘redesign’ phase that often occurs 6–12 weeks into an emergency response as the time for more thorough and structured conflict analysis.

### Conclusion

There are clear opportunities for connecting conflict sensitivity mainstreaming with the emergency capacity-building initiatives currently ongoing within many agencies, which address humanitarian principles, the new Sphere guidelines and humanitarian accountability frameworks. To strengthen the mainstreaming of conflict sensitivity in emergencies, modules on CSA and ‘do no harm’ could easily be introduced into humanitarian training by offering case studies, additional modules and technical support.

A significant amount of existing programme guidance is relevant to conflict sensitivity in emergencies. Agencies such as CARE, World Vision and Action Aid explicitly address conflict in their emergency guidelines and toolkits, and there is ample opportunity for agencies at an earlier stage in the development of internal emergency procedures to

use these tools as a starting point. There is no need to start from scratch. These documents provide a solid foundation on which to build conflict-sensitive emergency practice; whether conflict-sensitivity tools are actually in use in the field is, however, another matter altogether. This is the focus of the following chapter.

## Chapter 3

# Case studies: emergency responses in Haiti, Pakistan and Sri Lanka

In addition to the analysis of sector-wide practices provided in the previous chapter, this research sought to gain an insight into and draw lessons from the application of conflict-sensitive tools and approaches by selected agencies in three recent rapid-onset emergencies: the January 2010 Haiti earthquake, the 2010 floods in Pakistan and the 2010/2011 floods in Sri Lanka. The Haiti and Pakistan disasters were massive, with an estimated 220,000 people killed in Haiti and over 20 million people affected in Pakistan. While the January floods in Sri Lanka were on a smaller scale, they still affected over 1.2m people in the east, north and north-east.

Overall, there was little evidence of the explicit use of conflict-sensitivity tools in the Haiti and Pakistan responses, though a number of approaches did include implicitly conflict-sensitive aspects. By contrast in Sri Lanka, where the national Conflict Sensitivity Consortium has been working to integrate conflict sensitivity since 2008, there is evidence of the use of both implicit and explicit conflict-sensitive approaches. In Haiti and Pakistan none of the aid agencies interviewed for this research used a formal conflict analysis as part of their response strategy design; none had a conflict specialist based in-country nor had they deployed anyone with these skills during the emergency response. In contrast both CARE and World Vision Lanka have conflict specialists, and conflict analyses and training had been conducted by several agencies prior to the floods.

All the stakeholders in the case study countries identified conflict as a relevant issue, and in retrospect acknowledged that increased conflict sensitivity might have helped them minimise conflict and maximise the positive impacts of their programmes. In reality, it is unlikely that conflict sensitivity (along with other 'soft' cross-cutting themes such as gender or participation) will be prioritised in the early stages of an emergency response. It therefore requires leadership from senior managers to encourage context analysis and conscious reflection as soon as possible, as a counterweight to the 'hit the ground running' pressure of the first few weeks. While realistic about the competing demands, rapidly changing contexts and difficult operating environments in many first-phase emergency responses, staff and partners in Haiti, Pakistan and Sri Lanka all demonstrated a remarkable openness and willingness to learn from the past in order to improve programme quality.

### Understanding the context and the role of local actors

Overall, the emergency response in Haiti could be characterised as lacking 'connectedness to context'.<sup>8</sup> Although some agencies had run rural development programmes for years, many of the staff working directly on the emergency were new, and there was in general little

understanding of the specific urban context. This lack of contextual knowledge was compounded by the fact that most international NGOs did, and are still doing, direct implementation, with only a few examples of working with local partners. For those INGOs present before the earthquake, most worked outside Port-au-Prince, and had very few existing partners in the capital; those that were based in the capital had little or no experience of humanitarian response. Many civil society organisations lost leaders and staff and were struggling to rebuild. There is little evidence that agencies developed or tried to implement a partnership approach as part of their earthquake response programme, and there is still a marked absence of local actors involved in humanitarian leadership and coordination mechanisms such as the clusters and the Humanitarian Country Team.

### Exclusion of local organisations

Local organisations are very vocal about their initial exclusion from the aid effort in Haiti, identifying very practical issues like the decision to locate the logistics/coordination hub 'Log Base' a long way from central Port-au-Prince, making getting there an expensive and time-consuming journey. The extensive UN security measures in place at the base made access at best intimidating and at worst impossible. Particularly during the first six months of the response, the lack of French- or Creole-speaking international staff led to the almost exclusive use of English in coordination meetings and mechanisms. This was perceived as culturally insensitive and exclusionary by most government officials and Haitian civil society members. Even if the examples cited above represent unanticipated consequences of 'normal' security procedures and staffing constraints, local organisations perceived their cumulative effect as a deliberate effort to minimise Haitian participation in and oversight of the aid effort.

In Sri Lanka, national NGOs found that, whilst it was relatively easy to access government officials to coordinate distribution, liaising with the clusters, UN agencies and other international organisations was more challenging. One national NGO reported that they were excluded several times from coordination meetings and rebuffed in other attempts to link up with the international coordination structure. As a result they focused their efforts on coordination with the government and implemented their own relief programme.

### Context and humanitarian space

In Pakistan the issue of contextual understanding came up much less frequently in the research – perhaps, in part, because a partnership approach was much more common. In areas where the agencies had not previously worked, such as Punjab and Sindh, they made it a priority to identify partners as quickly as possible and set up inclusive

community management structures. There are obviously limits to what partners can do, particularly in restricted areas of north-western Pakistan. In Swat, the Pakistani military determined where and when distributions would take place, and individual commanders essentially had unlimited authority to decide when and how humanitarian agencies would access people in need. CARE partners reported feeling unable to press for more access because of the need to maintain good working relations with the military authorities, although they were cognisant of the risks this posed to perceptions of their neutrality. Partners requested additional support from agency headquarters in Islamabad in civil–military guidelines and the management of issues around humanitarian space.

In Sri Lanka, all the agencies reviewed were either national or international NGOs working through local partners, had worked in flood-affected areas for a number of years and had ongoing development and peace-building programmes. World Vision had used the Local Capacities for Peace tool to analyse the programme context at the micro level, and many of CARE's staff were familiar with the context. In both these agencies, staff used their local knowledge and understanding to inform programming decisions, rather than cross-checking with formal CSA tools or pre-existing conflict analyses to help them predict or pre-empt potential conflicts.

## Targeting

Targeting processes, particularly for cash and goods with significant monetary value, was one of the most common triggers of tensions and conflict in all the case studies.

### Targeting methods

In both Haiti and Pakistan the level of conflict experienced as a result of targeting was directly related to the targeting methods used. Due to the scale of the destruction in both countries, very little targeting was actually done during the first few weeks of the response, as agencies favoured blanket distributions of essential items. Conflicts began as the aid effort grew more refined and agencies began to distinguish between different groups and target the most vulnerable for specific interventions. Many agencies did not include a strategy for communicating with beneficiaries, nor used participatory or community-based targeting methods as part of this transition to targeted assistance. Tensions manifested themselves in conflicts between the local community and implementing agencies, between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, between camp and host populations and between residents of villages targeted for assistance and those who were too far away to receive goods.

In Sri Lanka, where aid resources were quite limited, all three organisations reviewed worked with local government officials, primarily the village Grama Sevaka officers, as well as the Divisional Secretariats, which under the mandate of the government's Disaster Management Committee are responsible for undertaking village-level needs assessments. Individual Divisional Secretariats differed in their approach, with some insisting on blanket support,

### Box 5

#### Aid packages exacerbate religious divisions in Sri Lanka

In 18th Janapdaya in the Damana Division in Sri Lanka, both Sinhalese and Muslim communities were displaced to transitional camps. During the initial stages of the response the government provided everyone with cooked food. Muslims in particular rejected the food because it was not prepared in a culturally appropriate way. When dry rations were provided, committees were set up representing the two groups to prepare the dry rations, and tensions eased.

which provoked disagreements with NGOs which needed to prioritise their scarce resources.

All of the organisations reviewed in Sri Lanka involved community representatives in decision-making on beneficiary targeting. However, there was limited communication with the wider community to explain and interpret the targeting criteria, and as a result resentment arose about the exclusion of some categories of flood-affected families. Certain agencies with conflict-sensitivity capacity were able to predict and thus mitigate targeting-related tensions: the CBO Women's Rural Development Society had been given conflict sensitivity training by Peace and Community Action (PCA) prior to the floods, and when they devised the beneficiary selection lists this training enabled them to identify local connectors and dividers. They then devised a strategy to talk to individuals identified as dividers, thus helping to lower tensions.

### Box 6

#### Conflicts can be difficult to see – even for locals

CARE staff organised a distribution for neighbouring camps in the Binot L'Estère area of Leogane, Haiti, identifying a central distribution area for beneficiaries from the two sites. Only when community members protested that they would prefer not to receive the non-food items than go across to the other camp did the field monitors, themselves natives of Leogane, become aware of a long-standing cultural divide between the two communities. The programme changed its distribution strategy to avoid combining the sites, ensuring that each community could access the goods in their own location.

Targeting poses an additional challenge when vulnerability criteria overlap with existing divisions within local societies. In the interest of fairness and equity agencies will attempt to set 'objective' criteria, but if this is done

without community participation or sufficient knowledge of the local context distributions according to such criteria may inadvertently privilege one group over another. In one village in Southern Punjab, members of the Arian caste tend to be richer and more powerful than the more marginalised Qazi caste. During the emergency response most of the flood aid beneficiaries were Qazis, not because of a lack of impartiality but because they met the beneficiary criteria based on vulnerability. The Arians felt excluded by the aid effort, particularly prized Cash For Work programmes. They started speaking out aggressively against the Qazis and the local organisations who were selecting them as beneficiaries, and the Qazis felt more threatened and insecure as a result of the aid effort.

In Pakistan, those agencies working through local implementing partners were able to use community structures to determine targeting criteria, and reported much less conflict than those agencies that attempted to implement directly with little community mobilisation and participation. While other contextual factors may have had a bearing on the level of tension experienced in different situations, staff from various agencies indicated a perception that using community-based or other participatory targeting methods from the outset of the emergency had allowed them to mitigate the risk of conflict linked to targeting.

#### Beneficiary/host community tensions

It is also important to consider the situation of neighbouring or host communities. In Sri Lanka, people who had lost their homes in the tsunami had been rehoused in blocks of flats in Islamabad village, where PCA was implementing a flood response. These families lived in extreme poverty, earning their living primarily as day labourers. Whilst this group did not experience flood damage to their homes their means of subsistence was swept away in the flooding as crops were destroyed and there was no work. Without savings or substantial coping mechanisms they needed help. Eventually, after heated discussion, it was agreed that they too would receive relief in a second aid distribution.

#### Box 7

##### Aziz's story\*

In Pakistan, Aziz, a community committee member, said that he was pressured by a powerful member of the community to put his family members on the list for relief goods. He refused because they did not fit the beneficiary criteria. Pressure and threats continued, and at one point Aziz was shot at. He survived the attack and filed a case against the perpetrator. The matter was resolved after the intervention of local elders. However, to protect himself and avoid future conflicts with his community, the next time Aziz was asked by an aid organisation to help facilitate a distribution, he refused.

\* Not his real name.

Immediately after the earthquake in Haiti levels of solidarity and mutual support increased across neighbourhoods and social classes. However, as the high number of people living in spontaneous sites in the middle of residential neighbourhoods has persisted, so tensions have increased between camp residents and the host community. Some of these tensions can be linked to the fact that, in the initial phase, most agencies did not assess host communities' vulnerability or level of access to services. Some camp committees allow their neighbours to access water, latrines and other services as a way of mitigating conflict, but in most cases this has developed as a community coping mechanism and has not been actively supported by NGOs (for example by increasing the number of available latrines and showers). There is also increasing frustration on the part of many communities living near the camps with the side-effects of the prolonged presence of displaced people: the smell of latrines is cited repeatedly as a source of conflict with neighbouring communities, along with a lack of access to recreational areas, school grounds, churches and other neighbourhood spaces.

#### Box 8

##### Maintaining independence with a price in Sri Lanka

Difficult choices can confront NGOs when faced with demands from the authorities. In one village in Sri Lanka, the District Secretariat insisted that relief be provided to the entire village in a blanket distribution. However, with very limited supplies and relief packages that had been carefully calculated to ensure sufficient aid for targeted beneficiaries in the area, such an approach would have meant most supplies going to one village, excluding other locations where vulnerable families had been identified. In order to target a larger number of vulnerable families, the NGO decided not to give in to the Secretariat's demand to provide blanket relief. However, this meant that the village at the centre of the dispute could not be included in the distributions because the District Secretariat insisted on an all or nothing approach to the distribution of relief.

Some agencies have instituted host community representation in camp committee meetings, and are including neighbouring residents in social events organised as part of health promotion, education or psycho-social activities. This appears to have helped in building relationships and reducing tensions between camp residents and people in surrounding neighbourhoods. As planning for the 'transition' phase begins, some organisations are explicitly adopting a 'neighbourhood strategy', which will take an inclusive and integrated approach to areas of return, focusing on providing a complete package of services and enabling recovery for everyone living in or returning to these areas.

## Power and control over the distribution of resources

### Political pressures

Like many emergency settings, affected communities in Haiti, Sri Lanka and Pakistan were extremely poor even before disaster struck. The money and materials injected by the aid effort represent an enormous resource, and one which can provoke conflict as various groups attempt to exercise power and control over its distribution. In Sri Lanka the floods coincided with local government elections, raising concerns over the potential manipulation of aid for political purposes. In a context where political parties often favour their own supporters, NGOs needed to be cognisant of this risk while continuing to provide life-saving relief to those most in need.

Likewise in Pakistan politicians attempted to control the distribution of aid resources to benefit their constituencies and increase their power base. Local partners and community committees were subjected to significant pressure. Where possible they resisted this, understanding that their legitimacy as independent aid actors would be reduced in the eyes of the local population if they became associated with particular political groups and parties.

### Community-based structures

Distribution committees and other arrangements which enable the community to participate in the management of aid activities can also be a potential source of conflict. Committee members can come under enormous pressure, as Aziz's story in Box 7 illustrates. In Haiti there were

reports of aid being diverted by camp committee leaders and members, particularly in the larger mixed camps where there was no clear local leadership and the legitimacy of many of the aid agencies' interlocutors was contested. If it becomes necessary to create new local structures to help manage the aid effort it is important that these are set up in a transparent and inclusive way, with all interest groups represented, and that there is investment in building their capacity in leadership, management and conflict resolution. When power is vested in committees it must also be accompanied by robust transparency and accountability mechanisms such as complaints procedures, as a counterweight against potential abuses of power.

## Participation, transparency and accountability

Tensions and conflict can also arise between affected populations and aid agencies. In Haiti there was widespread agreement that conflict was growing between international NGOs and other service providers and people affected by the earthquake. Some of this was due to increasing frustration among camp residents about the fact that they still had not moved to more permanent housing, an issue beyond the agencies' direct control. At the same time, however, these tensions can also be traced back to the approaches and behaviours used by agencies at the beginning of the response, which have entrenched certain ways of working and undermined more recent efforts to be more inclusive and participatory. The bypassing of local structures at the beginning of the response, and a perceived lack of transparency and accountability, has led earthquake-affected people to mistrust the intentions of the NGOs. In addition, beneficiaries cannot understand why the aid on offer does not always correspond to their needs (for more permanent shelter, help to pay off debts or employment opportunities), especially given statements in the media regarding huge aid commitments and a highly visible influx of assets and foreign staff. Finally, the lack of standard approaches and poor coordination among aid actors working in the same or neighbouring camps has impeded participation and led to confusion and frustration.

### Using accountability measures to reduce conflict

Conflict between beneficiaries and aid actors is greatly reduced where agencies have invested in relationships with communities and accountable and transparent structures for aid management. Staff from many different agencies agreed that having a sustained presence in affected locations, as well as extensive communication campaigns and complaints and feedback mechanisms, is critical. World Vision in Haiti has been reinforcing the role of Community Liaison Officers (CLOs), who were initially deployed as early as February 2010 as Accountability Officers. CLOs are now stationed full-time in camps under WV Haiti management, with a mandate to help all the programmatic sectors consult with the community, link with other agencies, identify problems and respond to complaints. WV Haiti management has recognised the importance of this role, and is seeking to professionalise and enhance the skills

### Box 9

#### Political threats and community-driven solutions in Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa (KPK) Province, Pakistan

A CARE partner wanted to reconstruct a local drainage system in Barha Nala Qazi Aabad Nowshera. A local politician who happened to be the provincial minister met with partner staff and insisted that the project be launched under his name. The partner refused, telling him that this would jeopardise the organisation's reputation as a neutral entity. The minister then instructed the local District Coordination Officer (DCO) to ban the partner's activities in the district and filed a legal case against the partner's regional manager. The partner responded by calling a meeting of local activists and beneficiaries, and copies of the DCO's letter banning its activities and reports of the minister's threats rapidly spread within the community. Community leaders held meetings with the DCO and other politicians. Mounting public pressure forced the withdrawal of the letter and the legal case against the partner was dropped within 24 hours. The project was successfully completed and both the minister and DCO were forced to apologise.



of CLOs so that they can better engage with the complex issues in the camps.

In Sri Lanka, PCA assigned ‘talker-listeners’ during their distributions to liaise with communities to ensure that any problems were quickly picked up and addressed. World Vision teams held daily meetings to analyse any conflict trends and try to address them in a timely and coordinated manner. However, neither organisation instituted any formal complaints mechanisms during their relief distributions, relying instead on information from their community mobilisers.

In Pakistan, CARE required implementing partners to institute a complaints mechanism to address grievances among the affected population and to ensure that the quality of goods and services being provided met HAP and Sphere standards. Each complaint received was fully investigated; if it involved partner staff it was investigated by CARE, and if it involved community committees it was investigated directly by the partners, with support from CARE.

These experiences underscore the importance of establishing clear and transparent communications with disaster-affected communities, as well as mechanisms to give and receive feedback, as early as possible in the response. Participatory methods may be overlooked in the rush to deliver initial relief supplies, but in Haiti particular agencies have paid a high price for not including communities from the beginning in assessments, targeting and project implementation. Agencies working in the camps have found it difficult to obtain the cooperation of beneficiaries and local authorities, have experienced security problems and have ended up providing inappropriate assistance, all of which have required additional time and resources to correct.

## Gender relations

Over the last decade aid agencies have made significant progress mainstreaming gender, including in emergency response programmes. Emergency staff are aware of their obligations regarding gender mainstreaming, but in the rush of first-phase response the most common approach seems to be to design programmes specifically targeting women. Aside from ‘ticking the gender box’, front-line staff reported other reasons for this practice, including perceptions that women were more ‘docile’ and posed less of a security threat during distributions, and that they would ‘work harder’ in Cash For Work programmes. In Haiti, informants reported increasing tension between men and women linked to the targeting of women. This may stem from a perceived challenge to men’s traditional control over household resources, especially given the lack of complementary strategies to provide men living in the camps with economic opportunities.

## Staffing

Staffing issues were identified as a major challenge in terms of conflict sensitivity in all three case study countries. Most

large-scale disaster responses result in a rapid influx of new staff, both international and local. It may be difficult to find experienced staff who are willing to deploy rapidly to difficult locations for long periods of time, so first-phase responses are almost always characterised by high levels of senior management turnover, and managers may not be familiar with the local culture, language or context.

### New recruitment and turnover

In Haiti, all agencies scaled up for the earthquake response by hiring large new teams of staff, many of whom were new to the organisation and to humanitarian work and a significant proportion of whom had not worked previously in the NGO sector. Due to the shortage of available qualified local staff, many agencies resorted to short-term deployments of senior managers and recruited internationals without experience in Haiti or French/Creole language skills, causing friction and misunderstanding between local and international staff. CARE Haiti’s senior management addressed these problems early on with all-staff meetings focusing on organisational values of respect and diversity, alongside weekly open staff forums. Learning from its experience in the tsunami response, Catholic Relief Services took a policy decision not to allow short-term assignments: all senior managers deployed after the earthquake were required to make a 1–2-year commitment to the country programme, resulting in a significant decrease in staff turnover and increased institutional understanding of the country context and the constraints to programming there.

Most agencies have introduced some kind of training for new staff including an introduction to organisational principles and values and accountability and participatory methods. However, most interviewees agreed that much more could be done to develop an effective orientation package that could be implemented quickly and much earlier in the response. Suggestions included a focus on contextual and cultural understanding for new international staff, as well as more on humanitarian principles, codes of conduct and community-based programming approaches for all staff.

In both Haiti and Pakistan conflict between expatriate and local staff was also reported stemming from perceptions of cultural insensitivity. Explicit intervention from senior management and a focus on team-building was needed, but rarely prioritised.

### Identity issues

Gender, religion, caste and language issues all play a part in conflict in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, so conflict-sensitive staffing decisions were critical during the emergency scale-up. Senior managers reported extensive conversations about the make-up of national staff chosen for assessment teams, and sometimes found creative solutions such as drawing staff from other departments or partner agencies to make up appropriate assessment teams, and ensuring that teams sent to the field were mixed, with at least one person from the local area. However, once implementation began many agencies brought in staff from other provinces

to work in the affected areas, due to the pressure for fast delivery and a perceived lack of local skills. This led to conflict between ‘outsider’ and ‘local’ staff, as well as resentment of the agency among the local community. Cultural and caste issues in Pakistan are highly localised, and some staff hired from other provinces found it difficult to understand local cultural values. Many agencies relied heavily on national staff from Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa who had gained humanitarian experience while working in the 2005 earthquake response, but who often did not have an understanding of the very different contexts of Punjab and Sindh. While local stakeholders recognised that outside technical expertise is often needed, they emphasised that this expertise should serve in more of an advisory capacity. From their perspective, staffing levels of up to 70% ‘outsiders’ were inappropriate.

## Inter-agency coordination

### Consistency of aid packages and approaches

Coordination and humanitarian leadership remain a problem, despite reforms designed to improve both of these aspects of humanitarian response. In conflict-prone settings these shortcomings have a conflict-sensitivity dimension in addition to their impacts on programme quality.

In both Haiti and Pakistan the clusters by and large failed to promote inter-agency collaboration, particularly in gaining and ‘enforcing’ consensus on standards of provision across agencies. In Haiti this led to significant disparities in the assistance different agencies provided. This was obvious to affected people as different packages were delivered within the same camp or across neighbouring camps within a concentrated urban setting. These disparities caused conflict both between affected populations and aid agencies and among affected populations themselves. Similar examples were reported in Sri Lanka. In Pakistan, where the affected area was much larger

and the implementing agencies were much more thinly spread, the lack of coordination, compounded by issues of capacity, permits and security concerns, led to the uneven distribution of aid, with less physically accessible populations being underserved. This created resentment and conflict both between local populations and aid agencies and between groups from different locations (particularly when neglected areas were inhabited by historically marginalised populations). There was also a lack of coordinated negotiation for humanitarian access and respect for humanitarian principles in areas of the north-west that were under special military control.

### Clusters

The emergency clusters are largely sectoral, and there is a lack of effective formalised inter-agency fora where aid actors can share analysis and develop common strategies to address cross-cutting issues such as accountability or gender, which are often key in conflict-prone contexts. Established mechanisms such as inter-cluster coordination meetings focus on information-sharing and are not designed for cross-cutting issues. In Haiti, CARE initiated a Cluster Technical Working Group on Housing, Land and Property in June 2010. This forum, which included members from the Shelter, Camp Coordination and Management, Protection and Early Recovery clusters, allowed different agencies to share experiences and access local knowledge. Haitian lawyers and land experts were also brought in to address some of the complicated questions around shelter and resettlement. These initiatives enabled programme planners to gain a greater understanding of contextual constraints and thus adjust implementation accordingly.

## Conclusion

Table 1 summarises best practice drawn from the case studies, structured around key common challenges that aid agencies face in applying conflict sensitivity in emergency response.

**Table 1: Best practice for conflict-sensitive emergency response**

<b>Understanding the context and the role of local actors</b>	<p><b>Understanding the context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information on context and existing local structures in orientation to new emergency staff, building where possible on existing development programmes' resources and analysis</li> </ul> <p><b>Preventing the exclusion of local actors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a partnership strategy which takes into account the identity and spread of local partners (most effective as comprehensive strategy designed as part of emergency preparedness plans)</li> <li>• Dedicate time and resources to ensure involvement of local partners during the first phase of the response rather than waiting until a later stage</li> <li>• Map and take into account practical barriers (language, gender relations, meeting locations) that could inadvertently exclude local stakeholders from the response effort</li> </ul>
<b>Targeting and beneficiary selection</b>	<p><b>Targeting methods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use participatory techniques to facilitate community input in determining targeting criteria</li> <li>• Ensure continual information-sharing with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries on targeting criteria and selection processes</li> </ul> <p><b>Mitigating tensions between host and beneficiary communities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify existing social divisions as well as those which are the result of the humanitarian crisis, and map them against the proposed targeting criteria: the greater the overlap, the higher the risk of doing harm and the greater the need for adjustments in targeting plans</li> <li>• Foster links between host/beneficiary communities where possible: have host community representatives in camp committee meetings or invite participants from the host community to activities organised as part of health promotion, education or psycho-social support</li> </ul>
<b>Power and control over the distribution of resources</b>	<p><b>Understanding power relations and preventing political manipulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map key local power relations and actors and use this knowledge to identify possible risks of, and measures to prevent, manipulation</li> <li>• Where possible, use local partner knowledge and community pressure to reduce the influence of powerful actors over the distribution of resources</li> </ul> <p><b>Using community-based structures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve the community in the management of distributions</li> <li>• Ensure distribution committees are inclusive and representative of all segments of the population</li> <li>• Balance the power of committees with robust complaints mechanisms</li> <li>• Build committees' capacity in leadership, management and conflict resolution</li> </ul>
<b>Participation, transparency and accountability</b>	<p><b>Using transparency and accountability measures to reduce conflicts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in solid feedback and complaints mechanisms and clear and transparent communication with disaster-affected communities (e.g. through Community Liaison Officers)</li> </ul> <p><b>Timeliness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster local participation and ownership from the start of the response so as to avoid the costs and negative impacts of having to adjust programming later on</li> </ul>
<b>Gender relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an understanding of gender among programme staff that goes beyond just the need to enhance women's participation in activities</li> <li>• Monitor levels of violence against women within the household</li> <li>• Listen and respond to the concerns of men as well as women</li> </ul>
<b>Staffing</b>	<p><b>Managing new recruitment and turnover</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold regular all-staff meetings, open staff fora or similar to foster links between new and existing staff, and between staff from different locations</li> <li>• Design an orientation package for all staff which includes contextual and cultural understanding for new international staff, as well as humanitarian principles, codes of conduct and community-based programming approaches</li> <li>• Require longer-term commitments from senior managers</li> </ul> <p><b>Managing national staff identity issues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that awareness of national staff identity issues informs staffing decisions and identify possible measures to mitigate tensions: draw staff from other departments or partner agencies to make up appropriate assessment teams; ensure that teams sent to the field are mixed, with at least one person from the local area; monitor the proportion of 'outsiders' making up staff</li> </ul>
<b>Inter-agency coordination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce conflict-sensitivity concepts to UN cluster lead agencies and OCHA</li> <li>• Support the clusters and advocate with donors at an inter-agency level for the standardisation of aid packages, approaches and geographic distribution</li> <li>• Advocate for cross-sectoral forums for the analysis of conflict and context issues</li> </ul>



## Chapter 4

# Conclusions and ways forward

Findings from this study show that practitioners are keen to see the principles of conflict sensitivity better integrated in emergency response systems and practices. This interest is based on a recognition that humanitarian action, particularly large-scale emergency responses, can cause or aggravate tensions and violent conflict and compromise the realisation of the objectives of humanitarian action. Given the level of support for the concept of conflict sensitivity, the chief obstacle lies in the practical application of these principles, taking into account the formidable constraints under which aid agencies often operate.

An examination of conflict-sensitive practice in emergencies, looking at both *explicitly* conflict-sensitive practice (where formal conflict sensitivity tools and frameworks are used) and *implicitly* conflict-sensitive practice (where practitioners take action to minimise the negative impact of their interventions but do not use a conflict sensitivity terminology), shows that there are many existing tools, standards and practices that can be built upon and reinforced to address shortcomings in the application of conflict-sensitive approaches in emergencies. There are clear opportunities for synergy between conflict sensitivity mainstreaming and the emergency capacity-building initiatives currently ongoing within many agencies. In that sense, mainstreaming conflict sensitivity in the humanitarian sector does not require any major extra investment. Significant improvements can be achieved through relatively simple steps which complement existing aid agencies' and sector-wide tools and standards.

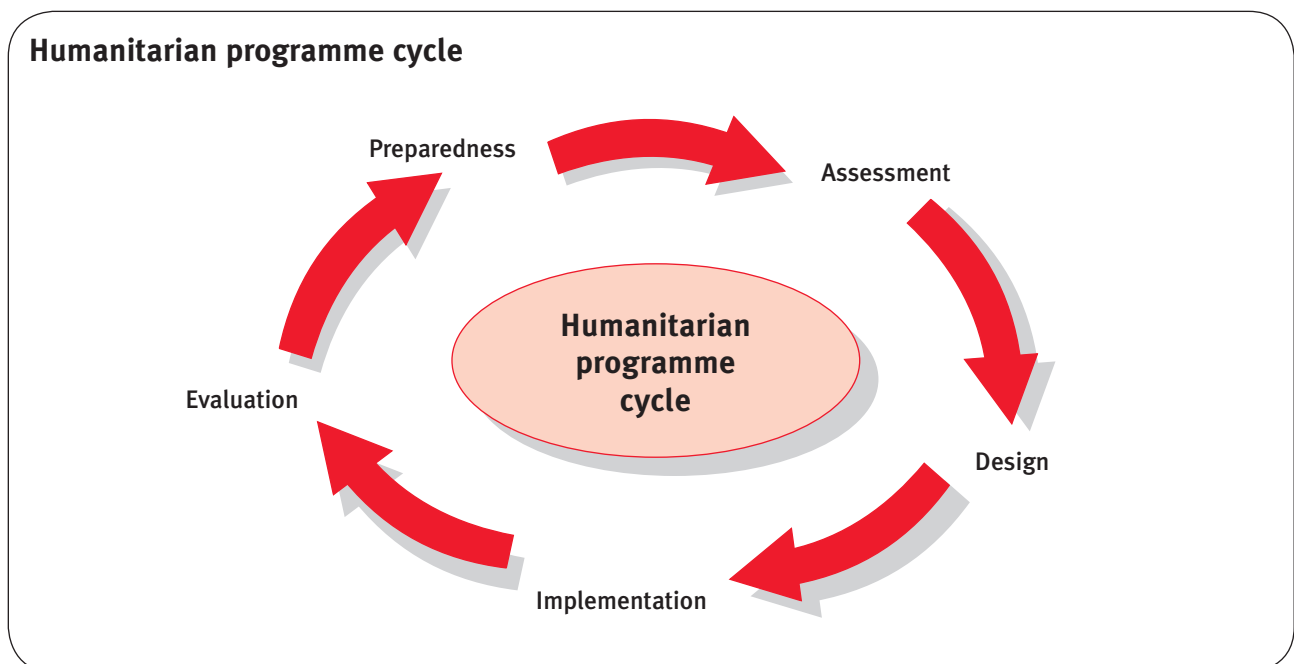
Striving to be more conflict sensitive in emergencies will not only help minimise harm and mitigate conflict risks, but

also enhance accountability, strengthen programme quality and increase the overall effectiveness of aid interventions.

### Minimum standards for conflict-sensitive emergency response

The primary conclusion of this study is that achieving the following six minimum standards will help organisations mitigate the potential harm of their emergency response activities and improve the conflict sensitivity of their interventions. These minimum standards build on or complement existing efforts to improve programme quality.

- Long-term emergency response preparedness plans include a regularly updated conflict analysis, as well as conflict-sensitivity training for both senior and operational staff.
- A 'Good Enough' conflict analysis is included as part of the rapid emergency assessment phase.
- Partnership strategies (including the selection, identity and spread of partners) are analysed in relation to potential conflict risks.
- All new staff, both international and local, are given orientation including information on the conflict context.
- Participatory methods are used to foster community engagement in developing targeting criteria and managing distributions, non-beneficiaries are consulted during post-distribution monitoring and conflict-related questions are included in post-distribution monitoring tools.
- Conflict benchmarks are included within Real-Time Evaluations and After Action Reviews.



## Operationalising conflict-sensitive approaches within the humanitarian programme cycle

For practitioners, the steps detailed below will help operationalise and institutionalise conflict-sensitive approaches within the humanitarian programme cycle.

### 1. Preparedness

- Ensure that emergency preparedness and contingency plans include a regularly updated conflict analysis, possibly focusing on countries flagged through a ranking system. These analyses could be developed in a participatory manner during the context section of a contingency planning workshop, through the technical assistance of a conflict advisor or consultant or by linking with existing development programmes' analyses. This kind of 'off-the-shelf' conflict analysis could then be rapidly updated in the first weeks of the emergency. Capacity audits or similar approaches which assess and monitor the internal capacity of a country office to implement an emergency response could be adjusted to include questions on context and understanding of Do No Harm approaches.
- Develop 'pick up and go' induction packs for new emergency staff. A generic induction module could be developed at HQ for easy use in the first few weeks of new emergencies. It should cover organisational mission and values, humanitarian principles and the key elements of the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and the basics of conflict sensitivity and accountability to beneficiaries. This should be customised at the country level to include a briefing on the local context and a conflict analysis.
- Develop a humanitarian partnership strategy as part of the emergency preparedness process, including criteria and guiding questions for the assessment and selection process, taking into account the capacity, identity and spread of partners.
- Include conflict-sensitivity training in emergency capacity-building efforts. A module, possibly focusing on Do No Harm as the most widely-known tool among humanitarian staff, should be developed and delivered within broader training on Sphere, humanitarian leadership, humanitarian basics, security management or other curricula that agencies are using either internally or at an inter-agency level. Training efforts should target surge capacity and roster staff, as well as key long-term country office senior and support staff and partners who are likely to be involved in emergency assessments and other first-phase response activities.

### 2. Assessment

- Undertake a 'Good Enough' conflict analysis as part of the first-phase emergency response. While many national staff and partners may have extensive contextual knowledge, this information needs to be captured more systematically and the key potential conflict flashpoints highlighted in a format that can become a basis for shared analysis and understanding, and thus integrated

into assessment reports, proposals and project strategy documents. Key for uptake by emergency practitioners is that any analysis uses a 'Good Enough' approach: that it is short, easy to integrate with other aspects of a multi-sectoral emergency assessment and can be used by practitioners with little or no conflict-sensitivity training. See Annex 1 for a suggested 'Good Enough' emergency conflict analysis questionnaire.

### 3. Design

- Ensure that staff recruitment takes into account the potential identity-based divisions among staff and between staff and beneficiaries, and provide orientation including information on the local context and conflict issues to all new staff, both international and local.
- Ensure that the selection of partners takes into account their capacity, spread and identity (ideally using a partnership strategy developed as part of emergency preparedness plans).

### 4. Implementation

- Community-based or other participatory methods are used to develop targeting criteria and the management of distributions. Non-beneficiaries are also consulted during post-distribution monitoring (PDM) and conflict-related questions are included in post-distribution monitoring tools. Many existing PDM formats focus on individual beneficiaries; to capture conflict information they should also gather information from non-beneficiaries and ask questions about the impact of the distributions at the household and community levels.
- Robust complaints and feedback mechanisms are established and used for monitoring the interaction between the aid effort and the conflict context. Additional questions specifically addressing conflict issues could be added to monitoring systems.

### 5. Evaluation

- Benchmarks on conflict should be included in Real-Time Evaluations, After-Action Reviews and other agency emergency response evaluation tools so that information on conflict and on the interaction between activities and context can be taken into account in the design of future programming.

## Sector-wide changes

To make emergency response more conflict-sensitive, the proposed individual agency changes need to be accompanied by measures within the sector as a whole.

- First, conflict sensitivity elements will need to be included in sector-wide tools when they are being revised or newly elaborated. For example, the Good Enough Guide, the HAP Standard, the NGO/Red Cross Code of Conduct and Sphere should be adjusted to include consideration of conflict issues, the link between activities and context and Do No Harm guidance.
- Second, there is a need to raise awareness of the

importance of conflict sensitivity in emergencies within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and other global humanitarian networks. This report makes the case for prioritising conflict sensitivity during emergency response and should be reviewed by IASC principals and by senior humanitarian leaders from UN agencies, ICVA, InterAction, SCHR, the IFRC and other humanitarian networks.

- Third, the inclusion of a conflict-related benchmark in IASC Real Time Evaluations and other inter-agency evaluation tools would help institutionalise learning on the interaction between activities and context in emergency response.
- More generally, the introduction of conflict-sensitive approaches to global and country-level clusters would allow us to approach conflict sensitivity from a sectoral perspective. This might include integrating Do No Harm or other conflict-sensitive methodologies into the training for cluster coordinators, or developing a guidance note on conflict sensitivity in emergencies for inclusion in cluster guidelines or within inter-cluster coordination guidance.
- Finally, increased awareness amongst donors would help ensure that context understanding and Do No Harm capacity are taken into account as part of proposal assessment processes and funding decisions.





## Annex 1

### Suggested 'Good Enough' conflict analysis<sup>9</sup>

Rapid conflict analysis for use in first-phase assessment
<p><b>Conflict context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the history of the conflict in the area being assessed?</li> <li>• What is it about and how long has it been going on?</li> <li>• What groups are involved?</li> <li>• What divides these groups (e.g. caste, tribe, neighbourhood affiliation) and what connects them (e.g. shared cultural practices, local peace initiatives)</li> <li>• Where are the conflict-affected areas geographically located?</li> <li>• Does conflict get worse at any particular time or period (time of day, season, during elections, during religious festivals etc.)?</li> <li>• What are the best, worst and most likely scenarios for the future of the conflict?</li> <li>• What does each scenario depend on?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Potential programme impacts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will the selection of beneficiaries relate to what connects and divides this community?</li> <li>• Are processes to assess needs and select beneficiaries transparent and well publicised?</li> <li>• Will the community be involved in this selection?</li> <li>• What are community and other local actors' perceptions of the identity of project staff?</li> <li>• Does your agency have any role (real or perceived) in the conflict?</li> <li>• Do your partner agencies (local or international) have any role (real or perceived) in the conflict? What are their relationships with other actors? How are they perceived by the beneficiary community?</li> </ul>

## Annex 2

### Example of a conflict-sensitive Post-Distribution Monitoring Checklist<sup>10</sup>

Post-distribution monitoring (PDM) checks that the targeted recipients got the correct food rations or packages of non food-items, and that everyone who should receive a distribution is able to. It may also check why some intended beneficiaries did not collect their rations or items, and whether the targeting and distribution process caused any problems within the community.

Within two weeks after a distribution, randomly choose a sample of *both* recipient and non-recipient households to interview. How many households are interviewed (the sample size) depends on the monitoring system being use. The sample should include households from different social groups within the community, with particular attention to marginalised groups. Ensure *direct* feedback from women and children on their access to and satisfaction with the distribution, not via other family members.

The sample size of the PDM should be larger than normal if the population is more diverse than usual or there are social tensions or insecurity, the types and amounts of food rations or other items actually distributed differed from what was approved and the distribution process was affected by late/missed deliveries or other problems.

A set questionnaire should be followed for each household. From beneficiaries find out:

- how the recipient heard of the distribution;

- who actually collected the ration or the items (i.e. cardholder or other);
- how long they waited at the site to collect their rations or items;
- what rations or NFI package they got – items and quantities per person;
- differences between expected and received rations;
- whether they had to pay any fee or tax before, during or after the distribution;
- how the community participated in the distribution process;
- the recipient's satisfaction with the process;
- if they are aware of the targeting criteria;
- whether they meet the targeting criteria; and
- whether they experienced any problems or conflicts with their neighbours or within their household as a result of the distribution.

From non-beneficiaries find out:

- whether they are aware of the distribution;
- whether they are aware of the criteria used to select beneficiaries;
- whether they agree with those criteria;
- whether the distribution caused any problems in their community; and
- whether they feel anyone was inappropriately included or excluded from the distribution.

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## Notes

- 1 Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – Or War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999).
- 2 DFID Policy Paper, *Preventing Violent Conflict*, 2007, p. 7.
- 3 For a full review of individual agency tools see the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium website: [www.conflictsensitivity.org](http://www.conflictsensitivity.org).
- 4 The right to receive and offer aid, which is grounded in international humanitarian law and should not be interfered with.
- 5 The Code of Conduct also refers to neutrality, or not taking sides in a conflict. This distinction between neutrality and impartiality has potentially significant implications for the conflict sensitivity of multi-mandate organisations that deliver humanitarian aid in conflict situations, and can lead to tensions between the advocacy or peacebuilding and humanitarian wings of an organisation.
- 6 'ICRC Protection Policy', *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 90, no. 871, September 2008, p. 752.
- 7 Hugo Slim and Andy Bonwick, *Protection: An ALNAP Guide for Humanitarian Agencies*, 2005, p. 42.
- 8 Emergency Capacity Building Project, *An Independent Joint Evaluation of the Haiti Earthquake Humanitarian Response by CARE and Save the Children*, October 2010.
- 9 Adapted from CARE International Emergency Toolkit Section 9.2 and World Vision LEAP Toolkit, Rapid Assessment Form Part 2.
- 10 Adapted from the *CARE International Post-Distribution Monitoring Checklist* (CARE Emergency Pocket Book: 197).

## Network Papers 2000–2010

**Network Papers** are contributions on specific experiences or issues prepared either by HPN members or contributing specialists.

- 34 *NGO Responses to Hurricane Mitch: Evaluations for Accountability and Learning* by F. Grunewald, V. de Geoffroy & S. Lister (2000)
- 35 *Cash Transfers in Emergencies: Evaluating Benefits and Assessing Risks* by D. Peppiatt, J. Mitchell and P. Holzmann (2001)
- 36 *Food-security Assessments in Emergencies: A Livelihoods Approach* by H. Young, S. Jaspars, R. Brown, J. Frize and H. Khogali (2001)
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- 65 *Food security and livelihoods programming in conflict: a review* by Susanne Jaspars and Dan Maxwell (2009)
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- 69 *Common Needs Assessments and humanitarian action* by Richard Garfield, with Courtney Blake, Patrice Chatainger and Sandie Walton-Ellery (2011)

## Good Practice Reviews

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- 1 *Water and Sanitation in Emergencies* by A. Chalinder (1994)
- 2 *Emergency Supplementary Feeding Programmes* by J. Shoham (1994)
- 3 *General Food Distribution in Emergencies: from Nutritional Needs to Political Priorities* by S. Jaspars and H. Young (1996)
- 4 *Seed Provision During and After Emergencies* by the ODI Seeds and Biodiversity Programme (1996)
- 5 *Counting and Identification of Beneficiary Populations in Emergency Operations: Registration and its Alternatives* by J. Telford (1997)
- 6 *Temporary Human Settlement Planning for Displaced Populations in Emergencies* by A. Chalinder (1998)
- 7 *The Evaluation of Humanitarian Assistance Programmes in Complex Emergencies* by A. Hallam (1998)
- 8 *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments* by K. Van Brabant (2000)
- 9 *Disaster Risk Reduction: Mitigation and Preparedness in Development and Emergency Programming* by John Twigg (2004)
- 10 *Emergency food security interventions* by Daniel Maxwell, Kate Sadler, Amanda Sim, Mercy Mutonyi, Rebecca Egan and Mackinnon Webster (2008)
- 8 **Revised edition** *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments* (2010)
- 11 *Cash transfer programming in emergencies*, by Paul Harvey and Sarah Bailey (2011)

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