

## Chapter 1

# Conceptual background and the need for improved approaches in situations of conflict and fragility

*Chapter 1 outlines the conceptual background to working in settings of conflict and fragility. Arguing that such settings require a deep understanding of context and conflict, the chapter first seeks to characterise fragile and conflict-affected situations. It then looks at the purpose and goals of external engagement and describes, based on recent evaluations, how development assistance sometimes misses its targets and can even “do harm” when international partners have not sufficiently understood and adapted to the real context-specific drivers of peace and conflict. It is suggested that better conflict analysis and clearer targeting, together with more explicit and tested theories of change and results-based management can contribute to improving the knowledge base for development assistance programmes and facilitate evaluation.*

## The need to better understand and adapt to conflict and fragility

Armed conflict has devastating effects on human life. People in fragile and conflict-affected situations are more than twice as likely to be undernourished and lack clean water as those in other developing countries (World Bank, 2011). Children are affected particularly badly: a child in a fragile state is twice as likely to die before the age of five and also less likely to be able to attend school (*ibid.*) Violence and state fragility are often characterised by systematic violations of fundamental human rights. The impacts of conflict on political, social and economic development are also profound. When violent conflict breaks out, development is derailed.

Acknowledging the fact that countries affected by repeated cycles of political and criminal violence represent a central challenge for global development, donors provide them with substantial amounts of aid. Official development assistance (ODA) to fragile and conflict-affected states has doubled over the past decade, reaching USD 46 billion in 2009 and accounting for 37% of the total available ODA (OECD, 2011d). There is, however, an increasing body of evidence to suggest that aid aimed at achieving sustainable peace and development is not making a lasting contribution to peace and development. In 2005, a review of more than 75 evaluations in the conflict fragility field pointed to substantial weaknesses in programme effectiveness, design, and management (Fafu Institute, 2006). These findings were confirmed during the application of the earlier draft of this guidance (Kennedy-Chouane, 2011).

In Southern Sudan for example, it was found the support provided by multiple donors in 2005-2010 was often mistargeted. Because donors did not fully take into account key drivers of violence, there was an overemphasis on basic services and a relative neglect of security, policing, and the rule of law, which were found to be essential in the process of state formation for the future South Sudan and therefore, critical to preventing future conflict (Bennett *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it emerged that one of the principal conflict drivers is that the Congolese justice system lacks credibility, political commitment, and competence and maintains a delicate relationship with customary law. The justice system is particularly inept in dealing with complex land ownership conflicts, which fuels violence and human rights violations, particularly where populations have been displaced and in the context of the unregulated exploitation of natural resources. Several large-scale multi-donor projects have targeted the restoration of justice and the rule of law. However, issues relating specifically to property titles, rent, and land rights have not been treated adequately within these programmes, according to local government and community groups surveyed (Brusset *et al.*, 2011).

There is no universal definition of fragile and conflict-affected situations – analysts and donors still have different notions of exactly what is meant. The OECD *Principles for Good Engagement in Fragile States* (2007a) – known as the *Fragile States Principles* – outline that in fragile situations, governments lack the political will and/or capacity to fulfil the basic conditions for poverty reduction, development, security, and human rights. In other words, vicious cycles of conflict commence when political and economic stresses and pressures

on justice and security meet weak institutions (World Bank, 2011). The OECD (2011b) also states that fragile and conflict-affected states are those that have weak capacity for carrying out the basic functions of governing their populations and territory and lack the ability to develop mutually constructive and reinforcing relations with society.

As pointed out in the *Fragile States Principles*, fragile and conflict-affected situations cover a broad spectrum. However, they do share some common features:

- They are inherently high-risk environments – for the people who live there, for their governments, and for those who provide and implement humanitarian and development assistance. The risks are not only related to the security situation (e.g. threats to staff, difficulty of movement, lack of access to information), but to the achievement of development objectives: risk of programme and strategic failure, fiduciary risks (corruption), and risks to the reputations of donors and implementing agencies.
- They are characterised by complex political economies and state-society relations, in which development partners can be parties to on-going conflicts and contested peace processes complicate efforts to prioritise needs and identify a strategic vision for sustainable peace.
- They are most often characterised by weak or non-existent national and local capacities and institutions. They are thus incapable of identifying or building consensus on peacebuilding priorities, developing strategies, implementing programmes, or monitoring progress.
- They are exposed to a combination of internal and external stresses that heighten the risk of violent conflict. Internal causes of conflict arise from political, economic, social and security-related dynamics (e.g. political exclusion, legacies of violence, crime, low GDP per capita, unemployment, identity-based conflict, and inequality). External stresses and regional conflicts can further exacerbate internal stresses (price shocks, for example, impact on inequality and unemployment) and some, like drug trafficking, can even cause them (World Bank, 2011).
- External humanitarian and development action is often part of donor’s broader geopolitical and economic agendas – such as combating international terrorism, stabilising access to scarce resources like oil, fighting transnational organised crime, opening markets for domestic firms and curbing immigration flows. As such, aid is at a higher risk of being politicised in fragile, conflicted situations than in more stable ones, and development actors may not be in the lead in setting the agendas for engagement.

### Principles and objectives of peacebuilding and statebuilding support

The past few years have seen an increase not only in international engagement in situations of conflict and fragility, but also in the convergence of development, security, human rights, humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding, statebuilding, and related agendas. It is internationally acknowledged that sustainable peace and development are critically linked to the capacity and legitimacy of the state. Donors need to base their interventions not only on the need to support short-term stability (or the cessation of hostilities) or on the provision of humanitarian aid, but on a broader understanding of how their interventions affect state-society relations and longer term prospects for the development of a functioning, legitimate state. Donor engagement in fragile and conflict-affected states is largely guided by the overarching aims of preventing conflict, peacebuilding, and statebuilding (see Box 1.1).

### Box 1.1. Key donor agendas for situations of conflict and fragility

#### Conflict Prevention

Conflict prevention refers not only to actions undertaken in the short term to reduce manifest tensions and to prevent the outbreak or recurrence of violent conflict (OECD; 1997, 2001a). It also includes long-term engagement that addresses the built-in capacities of societies to deal with conflicting interests without resorting to violence (Menkhaus, 2006), and extends to the management of disputes with destabilising potential. Such work helps de-legitimise the belief that violence is an inevitable or acceptable way of resolving disputes, making nonviolent alternatives known and more attractive, addressing structural and immediate causes, and reducing vulnerability to triggers. The goal is not to prevent **all** conflict. Some conflict is natural, inevitable, and a positive part of development and other change processes. Instead, the emphasis is on preventing harmful **violent** responses to the inevitably diverging interests and conflicting objectives that exist in all societies.

#### Peacebuilding

Although most peacebuilding focuses on the transition from war to peace, the concept and practices of peacebuilding are, in principle, about supporting sustainable peace, regardless of whether or not political conflicts have recently produced violence. Indeed, the mere threat of violence occurring is sometimes enough to kick-start a peacebuilding process. Peacebuilding, in other words, is undertaken because violent conflict is looming, is going on, or has recently ceased (OECD, 2011b). The emerging UN consensus (2007) is that:

“Peacebuilding involves a range of measures aimed at reducing the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict, by strengthening national capacities for conflict management and laying the foundations for sustainable peace. It is a complex, long-term process aimed at creating the necessary conditions for positive and sustainable peace by addressing the deep-rooted structural causes of violent conflict in a comprehensive manner. Peacebuilding measures address core issues that affect the functioning of society and the state.”

Such wording points to a preventive, as well as a post-conflict, role for the concept and practice of peacebuilding.

#### Statebuilding

Statebuilding has been defined by the OECD DAC as “an endogenous process to enhance capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state driven by state-society relations” (OECD, 2008a). The process must be understood against a background of long-term historical and structural factors that contribute to shaping the contours of state formation and the nature of state-society relations. And it must be understood within the exigencies of current circumstances in the country concerned. These may include the risk of violent conflict or effects of previous conflict – either internally or in the region – or the impact of economic pressures generated by global recession, debt, limited trade opportunities, financial imbalances and commodity prices (OECD, 2011b).

The objectives of conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and statebuilding are inextricably linked. Efforts to support and achieve them essentially address the same underlying problems. Their aims, too, are consistent: to help societies move in directions conducive to nonviolent resolution of conflict, address grievances and injustice, and move towards

sustained peace and development (OECD, 2011b). The wished-for end result of donor engagement in situations of conflict and fragility is not simply the absence of open conflict but a deeper peace, often referred to as “peace writ large”, i.e. societal-level peace or the bigger peace beyond the micro level of a single project (CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2004). The complicating factor is that peace and conflict are context-specific: there is no one blueprint either for the end state or the means of achieving it that can be applied to all situations.

Donors recognise that much remains to be done to improve their engagement. Working with partner countries, they have committed themselves to a number of principles and guidance documents that underline what differentiates engagement in fragile and conflict-affected situations (Box 1.2) from development co-operation in other settings.

**Box 1.2. Principles for donor engagement in situations of conflict and fragility**

- Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations (OECD, 2007a).
- Guidelines for actors involved in development co-operation, peacebuilding, statebuilding and security in fragile and conflict-affected states.
- Supporting Statebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Fragility: Policy Guidance (OECD, 2011b).
- Actionable guidance on the way development actors provide support to statebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected situations with a focus on strengthening state-society engagement.
- The New Deal for International Engagement in Fragile States (OECD, 2011c).
- Agreed at the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, South Korea, the New Deal aims to improve the effectiveness of aid in contexts of conflict and fragility. It sets out five peacebuilding and statebuilding goals and outlines how partners will work towards achieving them.
- International Support to Post-Conflict Transition: Rethinking Policy, Changing Practice (OECD, 2012).
- Presents recommendations for better practice in order to improve the speed, flexibility, predictability and risk management of aid during transition.
- Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), Accra Agenda for Action (2008) and the Busan Declaration on Effective Development Co-operation (2011).
- International commitments to improve effectiveness of development co-operation including by increasing co-ordination and country ownership, adapting to differing country environments and giving increased attention to fragile and conflict-affected countries.
- Managing Risk in Fragile and Transitional Contexts (OECD, 2011e). Provides information to help donors understand how to balance risks and opportunities in order to protect the integrity of their institutions while delivering better results to those who need it most.
- Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship (GHD, 2003).
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (United Nations Security Council, 2000). Establishes that equality between men and women is essential to achieving and sustaining peace. Calls for the protection of women and girls and for equal participation in peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

One particularly important international commitment came in 2007, when OECD country ministers approved the *Fragile States Principles* as a guide to donor engagement in fragile states. The *Principles* highlight the importance of viewing countries in their particular contexts and thinking carefully about the objectives and likely impact of specific activities. They also underline the peculiarities of fragile states, which call for well sequenced and prioritised action across political, economic, administrative, and security-related domains. Such an effort entails shared analysis, objectives, strategies and resources. The ten principles are:

1. Take context as the starting point.
2. Ensure all activities do no harm.
3. Focus on statebuilding as the central objective.
4. Prioritise prevention.
5. Recognise the links between political, security and development objectives.
6. Promote non-discrimination as a basis for inclusive, stable societies.
7. Align with local priorities in different ways and in different contexts.
8. Agree on practical co-ordination mechanisms between international actors.
9. Act fast... but stay engaged long enough to give success a chance.
10. Avoid pockets of exclusion (“aid orphans”).

Recent work by the OECD (2011e) has also helped to build consensus among development partners on the need to better manage and mitigate risks. Experience shows that donors tend to focus on fiduciary risks and ones that jeopardise the reputations of development agencies, using them as a reason not to engage in high-risk conflict or post-conflict countries. Development partners should, however, think more about contextual risks – the re-emergence of violent conflict, humanitarian disasters, etc. – and accept that the risks of non-engagement are often higher than those of engagement (OECD, 2011c). Risk mitigation does not mean eliminating risk, but, rather, finding appropriate ways of dealing with it. Shared risk assessments can be one such way.

The international community has made much progress towards understanding – and improving – the role of external partners in settings of conflict and fragility. These *Fragile States Principles* have contributed to changing donor policy and, to some extent, donor behaviour (OECD, 2011d). However, the effects and results of applying them have not been rigorously evaluated.

### **Aid that does harm**

There is an emerging understanding that ill-designed, poorly implemented, or badly co-ordinated interventions in fragile and conflict-affected situations can increase tensions and undermine capacities for peace. They can, in other words, “do harm” (Anderson, 1999a). Conflict sensitivity is needed to mitigate such harm by systematically taking into account both the positive and negative impacts of interventions (International Alert, 2007a). The implication for approaches used to deliver aid is that they need to be tailored to the demands of high-risk environments.

Donors need to be realistic about what they can achieve as external partners in limited timeframes with limited capacities. Too often they underestimate the challenges of engaging in fragile and conflict-affected situations and draw up plans and schedules that

have little grounding in reality. This tendency was confirmed by findings of the pilot evaluations carried out during the development of this guidance. Evaluations have also found that donors fail to prioritise their engagement and lack clear strategies to address core peace drivers and conflict-mitigating factors. A focus on providing humanitarian aid or basic services – and a neglect of key priorities aimed at building and sustaining peace – tends to be driven by the untested assumption that all development activities will somehow contribute to peace (Kennedy-Chouane, 2011). The illuminating example of a well-meaning intervention in Tajikistan (Box 1.3) demonstrates the critical importance of understanding the real post-war peace drivers of a particular context.

### Box 1.3. Do no harm – an example from Tajikistan

At the end of the civil war in Tajikistan, one international NGO undertook massive housing reconstruction in a southern province. The intent of the effort was to i) to encourage people displaced during the fighting to return to the region and ii) to support reconciliation between the former foes by getting them to work together in rebuilding the destroyed villages. Priority for reconstruction went to the villages that had suffered the most damage. In these, the NGO worked with local people to decide which houses would be rebuilt and organise work crews to do the construction. They agreed that “anyone from the village who wanted a job” would be hired in these crews.

A few months later, they had successfully sponsored the reconstruction of almost 60% of the damaged housing in the region. However, one day a local man came into the NGO’s compound with a Kalashnikov and threatened the staff, saying, “Why are you favouring that group that we defeated in the war? If you don't start building some houses for my clan, I will kill you.”

The NGO staff members were astounded. They had meant to be completely inclusive and to ensure that everyone who suffered in the conflict received equal attention. What they had not known until this moment was that during the conflict, the greatest damage had been done in villages occupied by only one (rather than both) of the local warring groups. By focusing their assistance on the areas of greatest damage, and by hiring people from the villages in those areas to work on the rebuilding, they had inadvertently provided almost all their assistance to one side of the conflict – and the “losing side” at that. Their project design had unintentionally reinforced existing inter-group divisions by focusing on mono-ethnic villages and channelling all their support to one group.

With a project redesign the NGO was able to supply building materials and support to multi-ethnic villages, to the damaged homes of the other ethnicity, and to community buildings that both groups shared such as schools, clinics and mosques.

Source: CDA Collaborative for Development Projects (2000).

Another widespread assumption is that being “conflict sensitive” is, *ipso facto*, doing peacebuilding work (OECD and CDA, 2007). As a result, much of the ODA aimed at fragility and conflict does not affect their driving factors. And, even when it is better targeted, it often remains ineffective. A case in point described by Bennett *et al.* (2010) is Southern Sudan. Between 65% and 85% of the total aid, including humanitarian assistance, from multiple donors in 2005-2010 targeted traditional socio-economic aid sectors. While this aid was provided in a way that many partners described as “conflict sensitive” (avoiding exacerbating ethnic tensions and trying to right historic inequalities), the conflict analysis

#### Box 1.4. Weaknesses around conflict analysis

Experience shows a number of recurrent challenges to the production and use of conflict analysis.

- **Partial analysis.** Due to time or resource constraints, it is often tempting to limit the focus of a conflict analysis to a donor's particular programme or strategy and how it might fit the context. Such an approach can lead practitioners to miss important aspects of the context or to develop misguided or irrelevant programmes.
- **Many people carry out context analysis, believing it to be conflict analysis.** A context analysis seeks a broad understanding of the entire political, economic and social scene. A conflict analysis is more narrowly focused on the specific elements of that broader picture that may cause, trigger, or propel incompatible interests or violence. Conflict analysis focuses on those political, economic, social, historical and other factors that directly influence the shape and dynamics of the situation of conflict and fragility.
- **Analysis is not updated.** Analyses are performed only at the front end of a programme. There are seldom efforts at ongoing in-depth analysis or monitoring and adjusting over time.
- **Programming is not linked to analysis.** Even when practitioners do perform an analysis, they often fail to link their programme strategy to it or adjust activities and strategies to changing dynamics over time.

**Many implementing agencies and field staff work on the basis of an implicit analysis, often based on their own experience.** Some programmes – frequently effective ones – are grounded in an informal analysis that draws on the long experience of local people or long-time observers of a conflict. These analyses can be quite sophisticated and may be constantly updated as individuals move about and talk with many different people. However, when analysis is done in this way, different members of the same project team or organisation sometimes operate on the basis of quite different understandings of the situation and their programme's role in it. This undermines the development of coherent strategies, weakens sustainability (when staff leave, so does their analysis) and significant assumptions often remain undiscussed and untested. Therefore, efforts to make the implicit analysis more explicit and to share observations are usually valuable.

Source: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (2009).

conducted by evaluators showed that lack of social services could be cited as neither the sole nor a significant cause of conflict. The aid, while avoiding doing harm, was clearly not addressing the sectors most likely to be factors in sustainable peace.

To contribute to sustainable peace, donors should work on different priorities across humanitarian, development, conflict prevention, stabilisation, and peacebuilding activities. Priorities may need to be adjusted over time as a conflict evolves or political context shifts. Such an approach often involves a combination of working “in” and “on” conflicts. There is a widely held belief that traditional development activities (in areas such as health and education) can have a positive impact on conflict dynamics. However, this assumption needs to be critically examined and there is a growing consensus that development work should be complemented by activities that focus specifically on removing the causes and drivers of conflicts and strengthening the capacities, institutions and norms necessary for conflict management. Evaluation experience shows that the main issue in determining the effectiveness of donor engagement in situations of conflict and

fragility is not the effect that activities labelled as “peacebuilding” have on peace. It is much more closely related to the influence that all forms of aid combined have on peace (Chapman *et al.*, 2009; Bennett *et al.*, 2010; Brusset *et al.*, 2011). Development assistance should deliberately work in and on conflicts rather than simply endeavouring to get round them (OECD; 1998, 2001b).

There is a real and growing need for thoughtful examination of development actors’ policy and practice in countries affected by violent conflict and state fragility. Consensus does exist that distinctive approaches are required to deliver effective support. Yet more work is needed to operationalise conflict-sensitivity concepts and achieve actual change at donor headquarters and country level, especially in terms of knowledge of conflict dynamics and how interventions relate to conflict, increased emphasis on outcomes and impact, and better understanding of the means of achieving these. Further work is also required to understand how individual donors should engage with national governments and align with country priorities and systems in situations where state legitimacy is weak or states are actors in violent conflict. More and better evaluation will contribute over time to helping practitioners better understand how to make their interventions more conflict sensitive, as well as more effective.

### Improving programme design and strategic planning

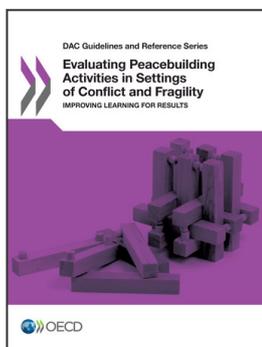
Because good programme design is key to not only working effectively in support of peace and development, but also a prerequisite for good evaluation, it is important to consider the basics of planning, monitoring, and management. Evaluation findings in recent years have shed light on core dimensions of quality programming. When evaluation and its requirements are an integral part of programming activities from the outset, it contributes to more effective programming and facilitates better evaluation. As the OECD (1991) states: “clear identification of the objectives which an aid activity is to achieve is an essential prerequisite for objective evaluation”. Some basic components of good programming are baseline information on key indicators, conflict analysis, clear and measurable objectives, a testable programme logic or theory, and monitoring data. These elements of programme design and management may, for a variety of reasons, be lacking or missing from assistance activities in fragile and conflict-affected situations, especially ones where fragility is prolonged and there is open, armed conflict.

- **Planning and conflict analysis** entails identifying the most relevant contribution(s) that donors, governments and other actors can make to support peacebuilding and reduce fragility in a specific country or conflict setting. Concrete understanding of the political, economic and social dimensions of conflict and fragility is a necessity. It is good practice to conduct a context and conflict analysis as one of the first steps in planning. The understanding that is gained should influence strategy, policy, and programme design and implementation. (Box 1.4 describes some of the weaknesses of development strategies and activities related to conflict analysis.)
- **Setting clear, realistic objectives** with clear target outcomes related to the context deserve specific attention. Peacebuilding and statebuilding programmes and policy goals tend to be general, vague, and consequently difficult to manage and evaluate.
- **Theory of change** is a set of beliefs about how change happens and, as such, it explains why and how certain actions will produce the desired changes in a given context, at a given time (Weiss, 1995; Church and Rogers, 2006). Developing a sound, clear, evidence-based theory of

change is one potentially useful way to improve design. Theory of change thinking is an approach that encourages critical thinking throughout the programme cycle.

- **Results-based management** is a management strategy that focuses on performance and the achievement of outputs, outcomes, and impacts. A key component is monitoring, which tracks how a programme is progressing and enables the adjustment of activities and strategies as the conflict setting shifts. Effective monitoring plays a crucial role in making programmes flexible and adaptable to changing contexts, particularly in complex situations of fragility and violence.

In summary, reliable, comprehensive programme design, management, and monitoring can contribute to better policies and programmes and improve the effectiveness of interventions. They also set the stage for successfully evaluating conflict prevention and peacebuilding programmes, notably by creating a theoretical framework and setting up necessary data management systems. Programme planners, policy makers, implementing staff, and evaluators should work together to strategise about how best to develop a well designed, effectively monitored, evaluable intervention.



**From:**  
**Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of  
Conflict and Fragility**  
Improving Learning for Results

**Access the complete publication at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264106802-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2012), "Conceptual background and the need for improved approaches in situations of conflict and fragility", in *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264106802-5-en>

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