

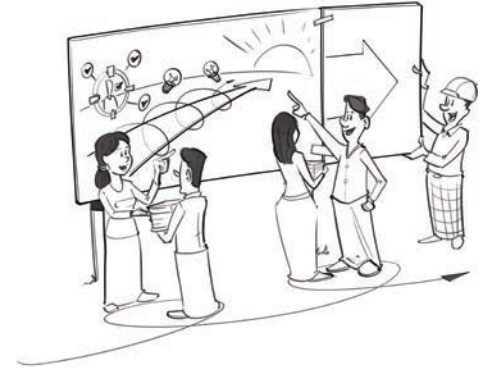
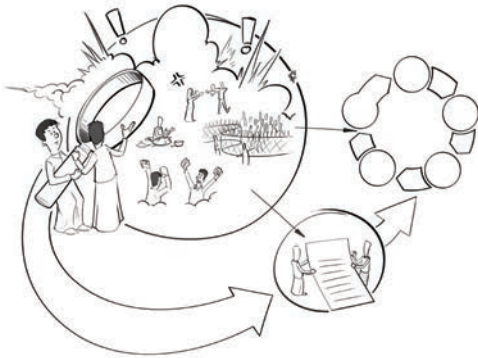


THEMATIC STUDY REPORT

# Conflict Sensitivity:

Experiences from Local and  
Community Development Practice  
in Myanmar

*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*



# About this initiative:

This report is part of a broader UNDP Myanmar initiative on improving conflict sensitivity in development programming in Myanmar through knowledge sharing, capacity development and policy action, with funding support from the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) under the Saemaul Initiative Towards Sustainable and Inclusive New Communities (ISNC) project.

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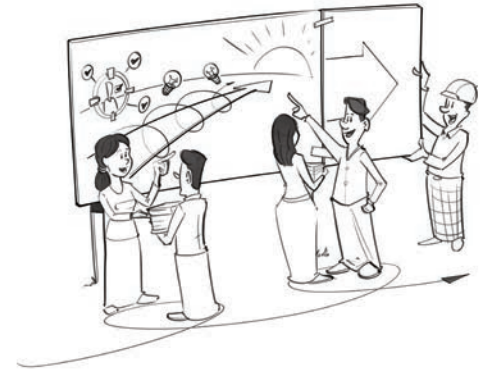
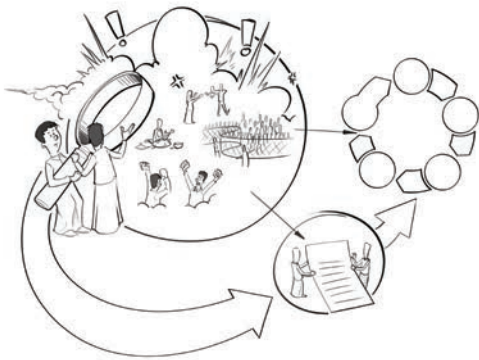


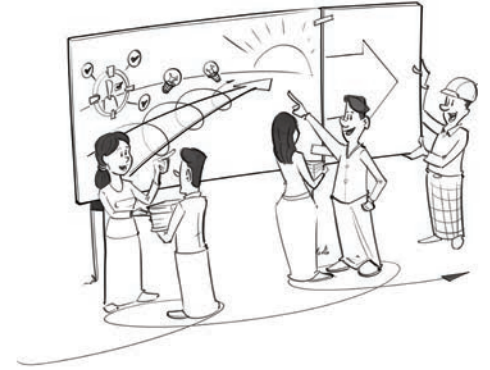
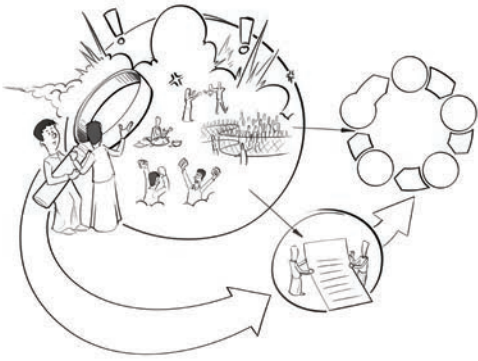
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# Acknowledgements

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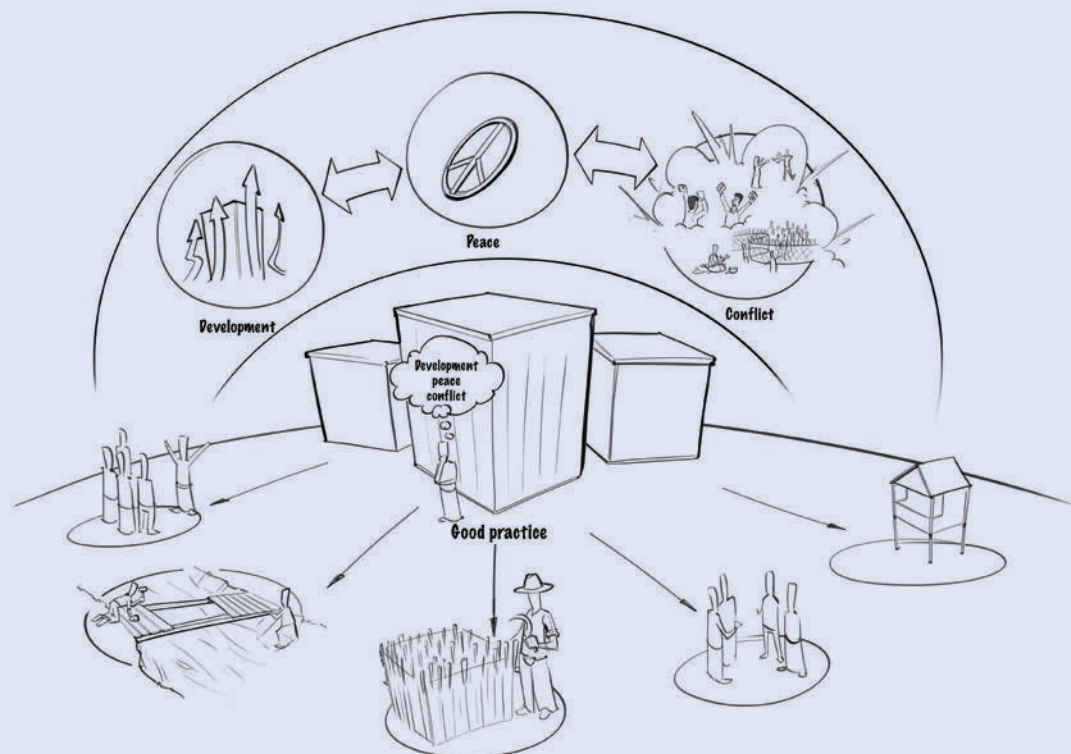
# Acronyms

<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>DNH</b>	Do No Harm
<b>EAO</b>	Ethnic Armed Organization
<b>GAD</b>	General Administration Department
<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index
<b>GOM</b>	Government of Myanmar
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Persons
<b>INCAF</b>	International Network on Conflict and Fragility
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organization
<b>ISNC</b>	Saemaul Initiative Towards Inclusive and Sustainable New Communities
<b>KIA</b>	Kachin Independence Army
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goal
<b>NCA</b>	The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Ethnic Armed Organizations
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NRPC</b>	National Reconciliation and Peace Centre
<b>NPT</b>	Nay Pyi Taw
<b>ODA</b>	Official Development Assistance
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>TOT</b>	Training of trainers
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

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# Executive summary

Globally, development actors are much more aware of the interconnected nature of development, conflict and peace than ever before. Being conflict sensitive means understanding the intersections between development interventions and the local conflict dynamics, and designing and delivering developmental programmes in ways that do not exacerbate conflict (Do No Harm), but instead mitigate anticipated conflict and enable and strengthen peace.





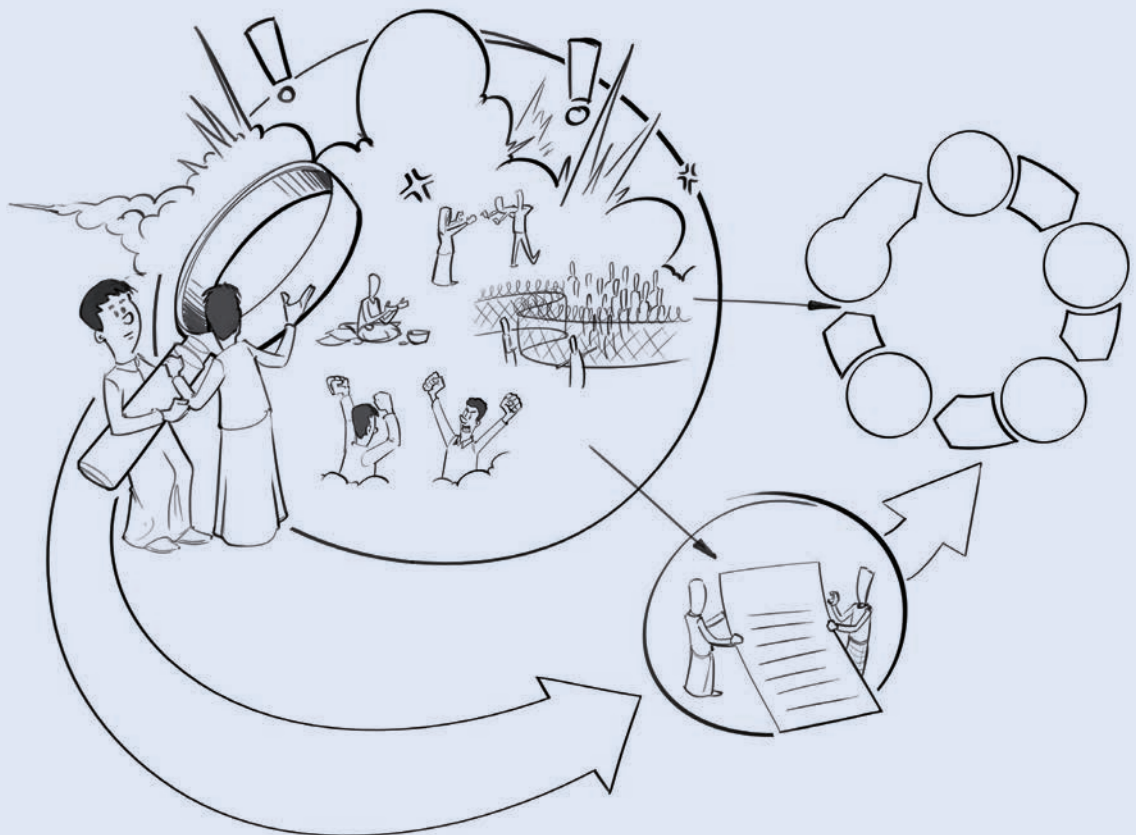
Communities in Myanmar have suffered from decades of internal armed conflict and intercommunal tensions. Myanmar has experienced a sharp increase in international development assistance in the recent past, especially following the transition to civilian government. Development projects are being implemented in Myanmar by a wide range of actors (Government, private sector, Ethnic Armed Organizations, donors, multilaterals, INGOs, NGOs, CSOs, etc.) and a significant number of these projects fall under the broad category of local or community development initiatives. In light of the conflict context in Myanmar and the potential impact of development activities on the context, it is vital that development actors recognize the inevitable impact of development assistance on conflict and peace, and that interventions are designed, managed, implemented and monitored in a conflict-sensitive manner.

This report aims to present experiences and lessons learned for integrating conflict sensitivity into local and community development programmes in Myanmar. While this report focuses on local and community development, many of the findings are equally relevant to other types of development support and investment. The report first assesses broad strategic conflict-sensitivity considerations for development actors operating in Myanmar, before moving on to consider specific practices and experiences of integrating conflict sensitivity into projects at various stages of the project cycle. It highlights the following key messages:

- There is a strong imperative for development actors in Myanmar to be (or to be more) conflict sensitive, given Myanmar's diversity, history of conflict and ongoing peace process, complex political and economic transition, and geopolitical dynamics.
- Development actors have sometimes misunderstood conflict sensitivity to mean avoiding conflict, avoiding programme implementation in conflict areas, or only as mitigating harm alone, without proactively contributing to peacebuilding. There is a perception among some development actors working in Myanmar that their programming in 'non-conflict areas' are not required to be conflict sensitive, because 'there is no active conflict', or because issues of peace and conflict in Myanmar are considered best left within the formal structures of the peace process and to a more select group of peace process and peacebuilding actors. This report suggests that the case for conflict sensitivity cannot be limited to development programmes in 'conflict areas', as this risks missing the interactions between development activities and the different layers and levels of conflict that exist throughout Myanmar, including multiple fault-lines around ethnicity, religion, language, class and poverty, gender, and age.
- Given the complex national political context, development organizations are constantly grappling with strategic trade-offs. These include managing tensions between state-building, peacebuilding and poverty reduction priorities in a context where the democratic, peace and economic transitions are happening in parallel and often in silos; balancing competing humanitarian, recovery and development activities, often in the same geographic areas; targeting geographic areas and population groups based on evidence-based criteria, while managing perceptions of bias; and sequencing development assistance to conflict-affected areas in ways that support, and do not harm, stakeholder and public participation in political dialogue and the peace process.
- Conflict-sensitive programme implementation depends on comprehensive and regular conflict analysis, consultative and iterative programme design; flexible and adaptive programme implementation; institutional buy-in and capacities for conflict sensitivity; and effective monitoring and evaluation. Trust-building ahead of and during programme implementation is key. Where programmes aim to move beyond Do No Harm, and proactively contribute to peace, these aims and strategies need to be included and measured, rather than treated as add-ons or incidental results.

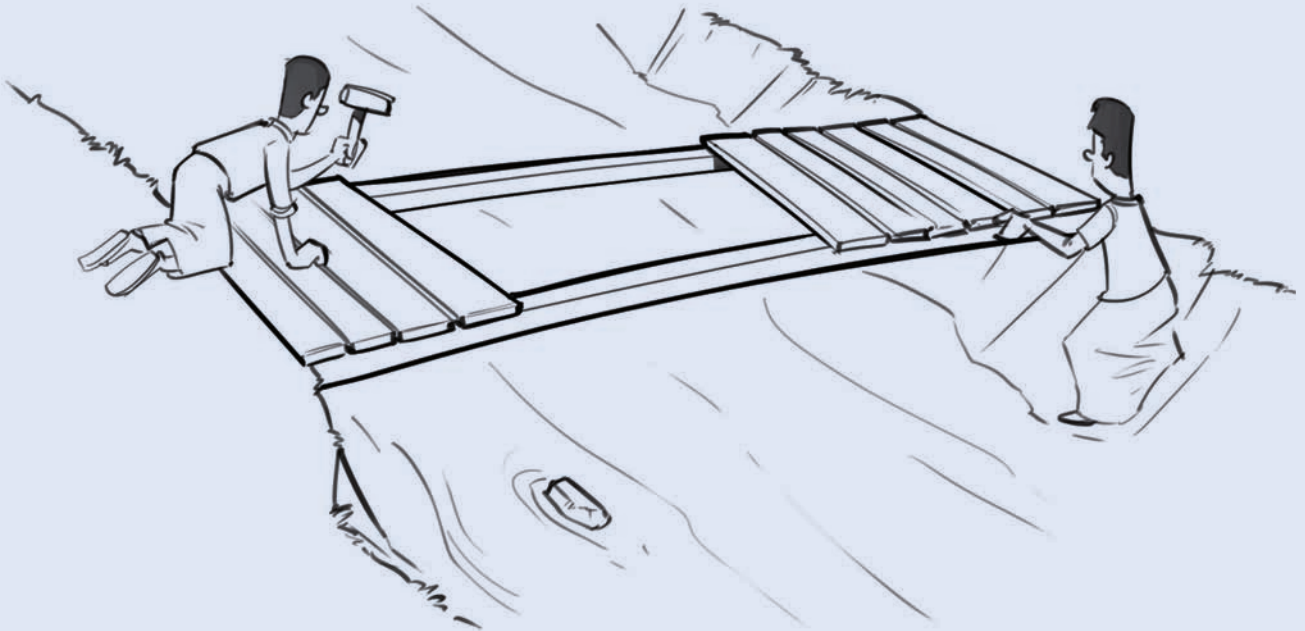
- Conflict sensitivity is influenced by how the concept is mainstreamed into programme implementation cycles, but also, and more critically, how it is strategically integrated by organizations. Often programmes and projects can aim to be conflict sensitive, but fall short within an organizational framework and institutional culture that is largely conflict insensitive. Conflict sensitivity must influence how development organizations design their country programme frameworks, how they prioritize and sequence their interventions, how they put in place operational policies and procedures, and how they invest in strengthening an organizational culture for conflict sensitivity.

**From these findings, the study makes the following recommendations:**



- 01.** **Assess the integration of conflict sensitivity** within organizations at all levels, beyond programme and project management.
- 02.** **Maximize the potential of local and community development programmes** and their potential as entry-points for addressing the root causes of conflict and improving peaceful conditions. At the same time, be modest about what such programmes can achieve within their immediate operating environments and those dynamics that are beyond their control. Ensure programmes achieve their potential to empower communities, and address conflict drivers such as exclusion and discrimination.
- 03.** **Invest in and regularize conflict analysis**, and put in place rigorous information, communication and feedback channels between organizational centres and project locations.
- 04.** **Prioritize meaningful stakeholder consultations** that are informed by an understanding of conflict dynamics and actors.
- 05.** **Put in place continuous and sustainable measures for strengthening the capacities of staff and partners for learning and sharing experiences.**
- 06.** **Improve conflict sensitivity measurement** through strong indicators and long-term tracking.
- 07.** **Strengthen inter-organizational coordination and learning** on conflict sensitivity.
- 08.** **Ensure that resources and funding approaches allow organizations to design, implement and monitor conflict sensitively.** Maintain flexible and adaptive programme implementation modalities to respond to changes in the context.

# 1.0 Introduction



This study report addresses integrating conflict sensitivity into local and community development programmes in Myanmar. It seeks to capture common challenges, lessons learned and established or emerging good practice in this area. It looks both at the 'minimalist' end of conflict sensitivity (Do No Harm), where programmes aim to avoid creating or worsening conflicts, to the 'maximalist' end, where programmes aim to tackle the root causes and drivers of conflict, reduce conflicts and support peace.

The aim of this study is to create comparative learning to inform local and community development approaches in the Myanmar context, while also providing useful information to similar programmes in other country contexts. While this study focuses on local and community development, many of the findings relate, and are equally relevant, to other types of development support and investment. The intended audience for this study are development actors with a mandate for, or involved in, local and community development programming in Myanmar, including government ministries and departments, Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), multilateral and bilateral donor and implementing agencies, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), NGOs, and civil society organizations (CSOs).

This study forms part of a wider United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Myanmar initiative for strengthening conflict sensitivity in development programming. In addition to considering good practice in Myanmar, UNDP is also undertaking the following: a scoping of UNDP's global good practice and lessons learned; capacity development on conflict-sensitive local and community development for key government ministries and departments; an international study visit; and the formulation of an indicator guide and menu for use by government institutions implementing or monitoring local and community development projects.

## 1.1 Conflict sensitivity

Interactions between development assistance, peace and conflict are more relevant than ever. As the World Development Report highlighted in 2011, armed conflict typically comes in repeated cycles and is a huge drain on development. At the time of the Report's publication, no low-income fragile or conflict-affected country had achieved a single Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target, which is a testament to this fact.<sup>1</sup> Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is dedicated to the promotion of peace, justice, and strong institutions, recognizes that armed conflict, violence and insecurity have a destructive impact on development and that peace is required for sustainable development.

## 1.2 Background: Conflict and development in Myanmar

In 1962, a coup replaced Myanmar's parliamentary democracy with a military government. State controls and economic isolation resulted in a suppressed business environment, stagnating infrastructure and technology, underdeveloped markets, and low levels of foreign direct investment, which contributed to high poverty levels.<sup>2</sup> The transition to a nominally civilian government in 2011 signalled a shift in governance and raised hopes for socio-economic development, democratization and peace. Following its victory in the 2015 elections, the National League for Democracy Government launched new economic policies, advanced sector strategies in rural development, education and health, and accelerated efforts for peace, including through convening two national-level Union Peace Conferences.

However, underlying inequalities remain across many areas and groups. Based on UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), Myanmar is classified as a 'low

<sup>1</sup> World Bank, 'World Development Report: Conflict, Security and Development', 2011, p.5.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank Group, Myanmar: Ending Poverty and Boosting Prosperity in a Time of Transition, November 2014, p. 7.

human development' country with the lowest HDI rate in South-East Asia. Most of the poor live in rural areas (76%) and poverty is often concentrated in conflict-affected areas. For example, poverty rates in Chin and Rakhine states—both conflict-affected with substantial ethnic minorities—stand at 71% and 78% respectively.<sup>3</sup> While the conflict-affected border areas are rich in natural resources, the benefits derived from these resources frequently bypass local communities. Lack of income opportunities in rural Myanmar and conflict in the border areas have resulted in widespread migration.

Since Myanmar's independence from colonial rule in 1948, complex armed conflicts between the armed forces and ethnic armed actors have resulted in death and displacement, contributed to developmental lags and poverty, disrupted social and community networks, and created protection and human rights risks, especially for vulnerable groups. Protracted conflict has also led to the emergence of war economies, including illicit drug production and trafficking. The country's development prospects are heavily dependent on rich natural resources and foreign-invested development projects in the border or 'ethnic' states, which tie development to ethnic interests, grievances and the conflict. Violent conflict continues and has worsened in some areas. Overall, there are some 479,000 Myanmar refugees worldwide<sup>4</sup> and there are an estimated 644,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Myanmar,<sup>5</sup> with 16,000 newly displaced in 2015.<sup>6</sup> In 2012 and 2013, intercommunal tensions between ethnic Rakhines and Muslims living in Rakhine state gave way to two serious waves of violence resulting in loss of life, destruction of livelihoods and public assets, and displacement of approximately 140,000 people. Armed clashes continue to break out sporadically in Rakhine, Northern Shan and Kachin states.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Available from [www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/myanmar/figures-analysis](http://www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/myanmar/figures-analysis).

<sup>5</sup> Available from [www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/myanmar/figures-analysis](http://www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/myanmar/figures-analysis).

<sup>6</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 'Global Report on Internal Displacement', 2016, p. 98.

The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) between the Government of Myanmar (GOM) and eight Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), signed in October 2015 and the ongoing political dialogue, provides an unprecedented opportunity to resolve the country's long-standing conflicts. The optimism with regard to the NCA is dampened in the face of the considerable number of non-signatory EAOs to the process, the slow pace at which incremental progress is made-to-date on the political dialogue, and ongoing armed clashes.

Myanmar has experienced a sharp increase in official development assistance (ODA) in the recent past, with ODA more than doubling between 2007 and 2011. In 2013–2014, Myanmar ranked the highest among world recipients, receiving US\$4.171 million in gross overseas development assistance from OECD Development Assistance Committee members.<sup>7</sup> Development projects are being implemented in Myanmar by a wide range of actors (e.g. GOM, the private sector, EAOs, donors, multilaterals, INGOs, NGOs, CSOs, etc.) and a significant number of these projects fall under the broad rubric of local or community development initiatives.

In light of the conflict and transition context in Myanmar and the high stakes involved for its people, it is vital that development actors recognize the inevitable impact of development assistance on conflict and peace, and that interventions are designed, managed, implemented and monitored in a conflict-sensitive manner.

### 1.3 Methodology

The study drew on relevant experiences from local and community development programmes in Myanmar, ongoing or completed within the past three years (2014–2016). It looked at programmes aiming to improve the local economy and society in specific subnational locations (i.e. states/regions, townships, village tracts, villages), broadly using local resources, mechanisms and capacities to do so. Within this

<sup>7</sup> Available from [https://public.tableau.com/views/AidAtAGlance/DACmembers?:embed=y&:display\\_count=no&:showVizHome=no#1](https://public.tableau.com/views/AidAtAGlance/DACmembers?:embed=y&:display_count=no&:showVizHome=no#1).

**Box 1****Defining conflict sensitivity**

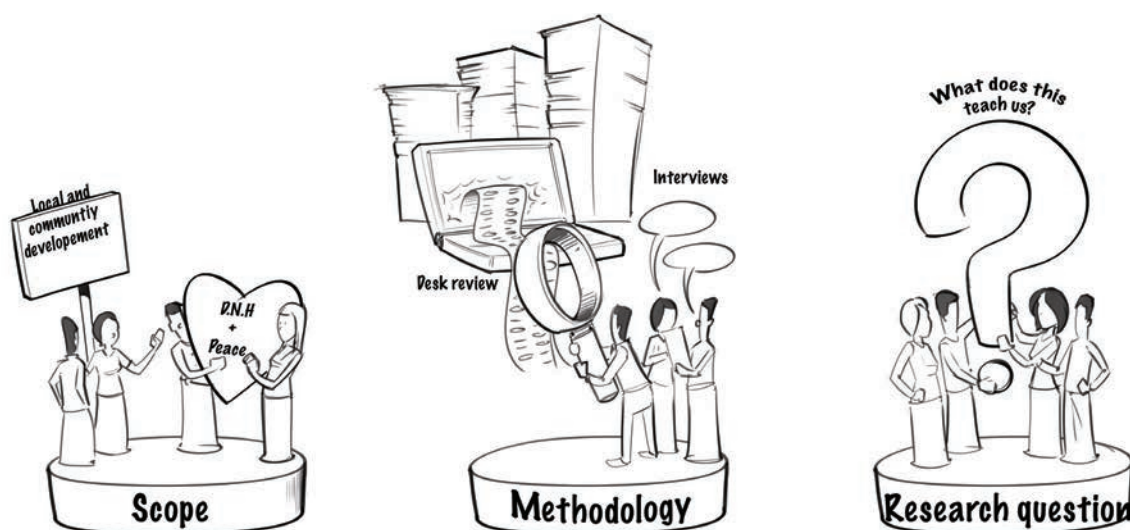
Conflict sensitivity is a way of working and requires development actors to:

- Understand the context in which they work.
- Understand how their programme(s) interact with and change that context and vice versa.
- Design, manage, implement, monitor and adapt their programme(s) to minimise negative results and maximise positive results from this context-programme interaction.

Conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm (DNH) are very similar concepts and frequently used interchangeably. DNH, as originally conceptualized, meant both avoiding the negative and increasing the positive impacts of the interaction between development assistance programmes and their contexts. Over time, many development actors began to focus only on the first part of this definition, and to-date, DNH is commonly interpreted at face value, i.e. to simply 'avoid doing harm'; however, both DNH and conflict sensitivity need to be understood as both 'doing no harm' and 'doing good', i.e. using development assistance to promote peace.

Since development assistance distributes resources (tangible and intangible) and changes power dynamics (intentionally and unintentionally) it is never, and can never be, neutral. Development interventions can worsen conflict or support peace at the immediate project level, but also at the macro level.





spectrum, the study looked at where programmes had deliberately integrated DNH measures and/or measures to make positive contributions to peace.

The study took a broad view of Myanmar's peace and conflict context, beyond the ethnopolitical conflict. In doing so, it sourced examples that relate to the ethnic armed conflict; intercommunal conflicts; identity-based discrimination, vulnerabilities and conflicts; state-society relations and conflicts; and intergroup relations and conflicts.

The scale of the study was managed to focus on local and community development, rather than on development more broadly, thus making its findings more targeted. The focus is relevant for UNDP, because of its in-country and international experience in, and critical learning from, downstream poverty alleviation, livelihoods and early recovery programming; however, as mentioned before, many of the findings are equally relevant to other types of development support and investment.

The study is comprised of qualitative data collected in late 2016: a desk review; semi-structured interviews with officials and staff from relevant organizations; and field visits. The desk review included existing conflict, peace and development analysis. Subsequently, thirty-eight key informant interviews (KIIs) of 60–90 minutes were undertaken with government officials; EAO representatives; representatives from a range of NGOs and INGOs; representatives from multilateral and bilateral donor agencies and foundations; and independent analysts. Field visits to Rakhine and

Kayah states were conducted to observe programmes and gather local perspectives. KIIs and focus group discussions were conducted with beneficiaries (in both mixed-sex and women-only groups), community leaders, civil society representatives and project staff. The field visits helped to contextualize and triangulate the interview findings.

The study centred on an overarching research question: What learning does this experience/programme/project offer about designing, implementing, sustaining and measuring the application and impact of conflict sensitivity in local and community development programming? More specifically, the study inquired into whether and how initiatives aimed to fulfil DNH and/or support peace, and where and how this informed the various phases of programme or project implementation, including sustainability, measurability, tools, areas of innovation, and lessons. The study did not aim to test a particular theory or approach to conflict sensitivity; instead, it aimed to analyse relevant experiences and extract relevant learning for Myanmar.

The respondents interviewed and organizations, programmes or projects referenced in this study are anonymized to allow for honest reflection of experiences and learning.

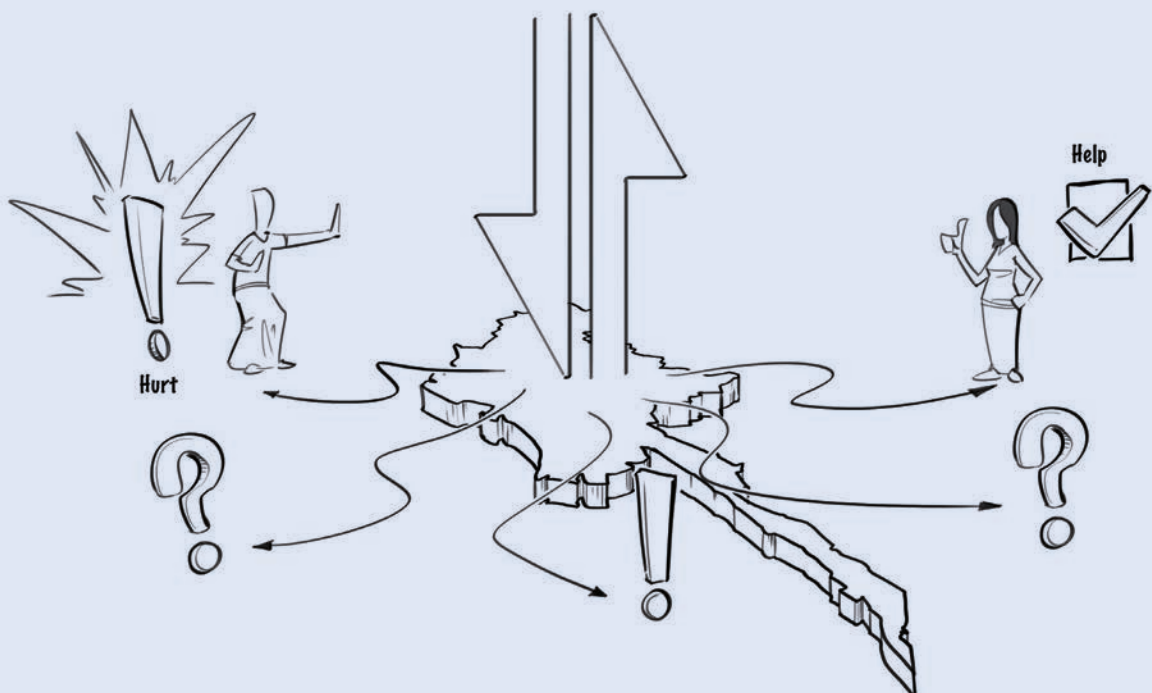
### Limitations

Contributions of relevance are limited to local and community development in Myanmar. The scope does not cover large-scale development projects or private sector investments.

## 2.0

# Findings:

## Conflict sensitivity in local and community development practice



## 2.1

### Principles, policy and strategy

This section of the report briefly scans the broader issues around principles and strategy, as they directly and indirectly impact local and community development work in the country.

#### 2.1.1 Conflict sensitivity principles

In 2013, the GOM and development partners signed the Nay Pyi Taw (NPT) Accord, which sets out commitments for effective development cooperation.<sup>1</sup> The Accord makes direct references to conflict sensitivity and to related issues such as democratic practices, respect for human rights, inclusive participation and citizen empowerment. The NPT Accord was followed by the ‘Guide to International Assistance in Myanmar’ developed by the Foreign Economic Relations Department of the Ministry of Planning and Finance in 2014. This Guide includes a commitment to “understanding the social context” and “proper consultations” with “all key stakeholder groups”, and emphasizes these measures “given the importance of fostering social harmony” in Myanmar.<sup>2</sup>

The NPT Accord, which is in line with the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (Busan, 2011), is a commitment to the principles of government ownership and alignment with national policy priorities. Some interviewees noted that the NCA and previous bilateral ceasefires sit in partial tension with these principles. The

NCA contains provisions that recognize the role of EAOs in socio-economic development. In fact, Article 25 of the NCA specifically mandates EAOs to “receive aid from donor agencies both inside and outside the country for regional development and capacity-building projects.”<sup>3</sup> For many development organizations, ensuring the ownership and buy-in of both the state and multiple non-state actors at multiple levels has become a challenging balancing act.

International and national organizations have made several efforts to come together around conflict sensitivity principles. For example, the Myanmar Peace Support Initiative, a donor-funded initiative that implemented a number of humanitarian and development projects in ceasefire areas, used its lessons learned to develop guiding considerations in 2014.<sup>4</sup> A Peace Donor Support Group (later renamed the Peace Support Group), which was initiated to improve coordinated support to the peace process, agreed to 16 principles for conflict-sensitive engagement in 2015. More recently, in 2016, an informal Aid and Conflict Working Group, part of the International Peace Support Group—comprised of development and peacebuilding NGOs and independent analysts—also developed conflict sensitivity principles. Most recently, the South-East Working Group—comprised of representatives of donors/countries, INGOs and United Nations Agencies—drafted a discussion paper on conflict sensitivity, intended to guide organizations working in south-eastern Myanmar.

These initiatives provide opportunities for development organizations to discuss and build consensus around principles. They are, however, non-binding. There were no examples cited of common principles translated into more practical tools and adopted by member

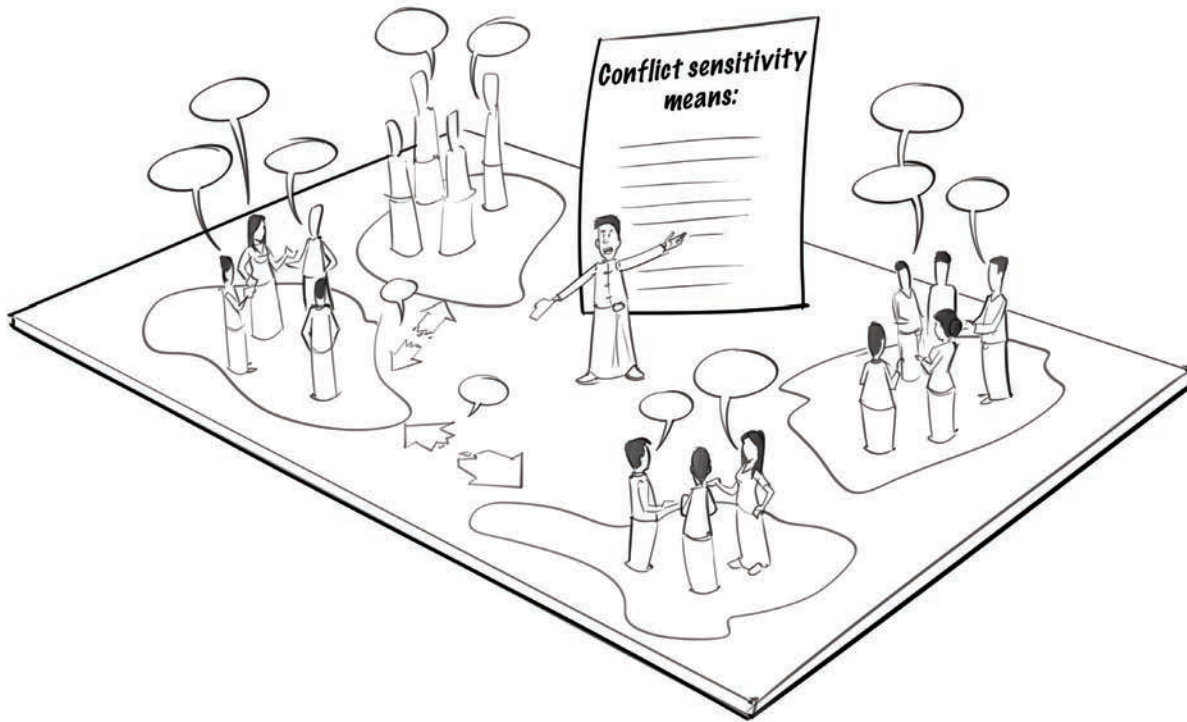
<sup>1</sup> Available from [https://mohinga.info/static/docs/NPTA\\_Effective\\_Development\\_Cooperation.pdf](https://mohinga.info/static/docs/NPTA_Effective_Development_Cooperation.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, ‘Guide to International Assistance in Myanmar’, 2014, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Ethnic Armed Organizations, article 26, point 5, 2015, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Myanmar Peace Support Initiative, ‘Lessons Learned from MPSI’s Work Supporting the Peace Process in Myanmar: March 2012–March 2014’, March 2014, pp. 68–70.

## Different understandings of conflict sensitivity



organizations of these groups. There were also no examples cited where efforts were made to facilitate broader consensus around conflict sensitivity principles, for example, with government, EAOs, or with certain bilateral donors that don't traditionally participate in such forums. Instead, to date such efforts have stayed within certain groups (e.g. donors, NGOs, etc.) or within circles of 'like-minded' organizations. As a result, opportunities are lost to facilitate broader consensus on conflict sensitivity principles across the development sector.

### 2.1.2 Coherence and coordination

Moving from principles to practice is challenging in any context, but in Myanmar it is more so, considering the complexity and very diverse development environment. Myanmar's formal peace process is largely nationally driven, with no direct international facilitation or mediation. This means that some of the typical features of international assistance around externally facilitated peace processes, such as global pledging conferences or global funds, are largely absent. These features don't automatically ensure stronger coherence or better coordination. In

fact, as some interviewees pointed out, they can heighten international donor rivalries and lead to more confusion. At the same time, as some others pointed out, the absence of an overarching coordination mechanism for peace-driven development assistance also leads to highly diverse approaches by development organizations and uneven implementation of development projects in conflict-affected areas.<sup>5</sup>

There are fairly robust conventional development coordination structures between Government, development partners and CSOs at national and sectoral levels, as well as various development partners' groups and working committees, both at national and subnational levels.<sup>6</sup> Conflict sensitivity is not, however, frequently or systematically adopted in these forums, and when it is, efforts are not sustained.

<sup>5</sup> A Joint Coordination Body was created in December 2016, which intends to function as a joint mechanism between the GOM and EAOs for coordinating international assistance to the peace process. It is too early to comment on whether and how this structure will approach conflict sensitivity in development.

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see the Myanmar Information Unit at [http://www.themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Ref\\_Doc\\_Joint\\_Coordination\\_Structure\\_Overview.pdf](http://www.themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Ref_Doc_Joint_Coordination_Structure_Overview.pdf). As of December 2016, a new Development Assistance Coordination Unit is in place to coordinate development between the GOM and development partners.

There is stronger traction for common principles and strategies when donors come together around joint funding efforts. For example, two relatively long-standing multi-donor trust funds, the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund and the 3 Millennium Development Goals health facility, established in 2009 and 2012 respectively, have increasingly systemized conflict sensitivity into their project management cycles and have also drawn on dedicated conflict experts and expertise. Two more recent multi-donor mechanisms, the Peace Support Fund and the Joint Peace Fund, also have a strong focus on conflict sensitivity, which is an explicit criterion for assessing potential projects and partners.

Some interviewees also pointed out that where development actors make efforts to be more conflict sensitive, they tend to focus solely on ethnic conflicts or on their work in conflict-affected areas, as if *conflict is not a problem elsewhere*. This refers back to the need for a multidimensional understanding of Myanmar's peace and conflict context, beyond both ethno-political and violent conflicts. If development programmes take a narrow assessment of conflict, they risk overlooking other forms of conflict, including those of religion, language, socio-economic status, gender and age, and also state-society and local-level conflicts.

### 2.1.3 Strategic tensions

Myanmar's political and developmental context is complex and fluid, with a democratic transition in its early stages; several civil conflicts; varied and hybrid forms of authority and service delivery; and an ongoing peace process. Additionally, given Myanmar's history, geostrategic location, socio-economic investment, and market and development potential, the country attracts substantial international attention and is a top foreign policy priority for many foreign governments. In this context, moving from principles to operations frequently involves trade-offs.

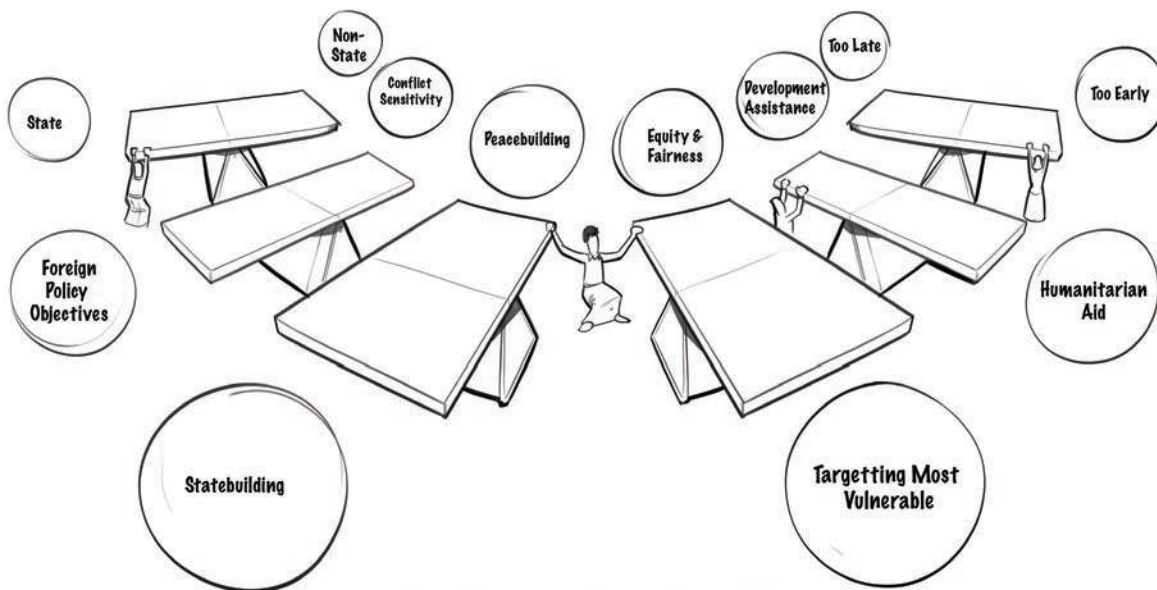
First, despite good intentions, foreign policy objectives can overshadow conflict sensitivity principles. Many interviewees shared examples where they felt international donors had interpreted Myanmar's democratic transition or peace process too positively and initiated investments and development projects in conflict-affected areas too quickly. They found that these efforts were not mindful of the fragility of the transition

and peace processes, and risked marginalizing local stakeholders and communities, and triggering new or increased conflicts, for example over natural resources and land.

Second, given Myanmar's poverty, governance and conflict challenges (and the 'triple economic, political and peace transition' occurring simultaneously), development organizations are constantly having to balance between poverty alleviation, state-building and peacebuilding priorities. Strengthening institutions and rebuilding trust between the institutions and the people are important priorities in transitional countries. At the same time, if state-building focuses on formal institutions only, it can exclude those who are not yet part of the governance mainstream, including informal institutions, non-state actors and communities. If these formal institutions are not representative or inclusive, then development assistance will reinforce the same patterns of exclusion that gave rise to the conflict and erode trust between conflict parties, as well as between the State and society.

Third, there are tensions for development actors around aligning with and strengthening the State for greater effectiveness and improved service delivery in a context where there are multiple non-state actors delivering services, and the interim and final arrangements of a peace settlement are still unknown. Interviewees pointed out that supporting state-driven local and community development can (both in perception and reality) consolidate government control in contested territories. In the same way, aligning with and supporting local and community development efforts of EAOs can (both in perception and reality) consolidate their control in contested territories, at the risk of undermining the (current or future) role of the State, other non-state actors and minority groups.

Another dimension is the timing and sequencing of development assistance in conflict-affected areas. On the one hand, it is important to address the needs of conflict-affected communities and to avoid reinforcing patterns of discrimination and marginalization. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, development assistance can reinforce patterns of control and exclusion, which risks causing harm and making sustainable peace more difficult to achieve. Additionally, while post-conflict assistance can be a valuable peace dividend and confidence-building measure, if it comes



### Tensions and trade-offs

too far ahead of, or too far after, the peace process and peace settlement, it can discourage parties from staying at the negotiations table and discourage communities from supporting a lengthy peace process.

Also, there are seeming tensions in the traditional differentiation between humanitarian and development support. Interviewees noted that there is often competition between humanitarian and development assistance, where prioritizing one often comes at the cost of the other, both politically and financially. This is most marked where humanitarian situations have become protracted, such as in the South-East, Rakhine, northern Shan and Kachin states, where humanitarian and development organizations work alongside each other in the same areas.

Another key dilemma centres around targeting development support to the most vulnerable while managing perceptions of equity and fairness. Often, this also depends on the mandates or strategic objectives (and theories of change) of different organizations and programmes; that is, whether the primary aim is to meet humanitarian and recovery needs, address structural poverty and discrimination, or promote peace. For one organization, whose main goal is to support the peace process, development assistance is a tool for dialogue between the Government and EAOs. Therefore, beneficiary targeting is left to their discretion. For some others, the balance is reversed, where their main goal is to address poverty and development needs, and they

navigate dynamics between the Government and the EAOs in order to address these needs.

Sensitivities around beneficiary targeting have been particularly acute in Rakhine state, where strategies have vacillated. Following the violence between Muslim and ethnic Rakhine communities in 2012, humanitarian assistance was provided overwhelmingly to Muslims in camps for IDPs. This was perceived as unjust and biased by the ethnic Rakhine communities, given their own long-standing poverty, and sparked a backlash against international agencies.<sup>7</sup> In response, development organizations have tried to strike a better balance between humanitarian and development support and beneficiary targeting, though interviewees shared that they still grapple with the challenge of ensuring that assistance is evidence-based and equitable (see further discussion section 2.2.2 below).

#### 2.1.4 Motivating factors for conflict-sensitizing development

What motivates development actors to mainstream conflict sensitivity?

There was broad agreement among interviewees that senior decision makers are key to setting the level of ambition, operational parameters, incentives

<sup>7</sup> Aron, Gabrielle, 'Reshaping engagement: Perspectives on conflict sensitivity in Rakhine state', CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2016, p. 5.

and sanctions for conflict-sensitive programme implementation. In hierarchical bureaucracies, such as government departments, the United Nations and INGOs, interviewees noted that it was important for senior managers to give the necessary approval for conflict-sensitive programming, without which efforts at the working or technical level were largely unsuccessful. There was an impression that certain organizations were implementing individual conflict-sensitive projects in a vacuum, where the broader programme portfolio and policy engagement was largely 'conflict blind'. One interviewee observed that organizations with strong leadership and autonomy at country level—where they have the authority and flexibility to adapt programmes to respond to peace and conflict needs as they evolve—fared better with conflict sensitivity measures. Funders themselves play an important role in setting the tone for conflict sensitivity. Development organizations reported that receiving pressure, support or space (or all of above) from donors for conflict-sensitive programming, including to adapt programming in response to changes in the context, was key to their own success on this front.

Organizations have also been compelled to think or rethink their programming from a conflict sensitivity perspective after getting their "fingers burnt". For example, one organization engaging in the South-East reported that criticism from an EAO first alerted them to conflict sensitivity concerns, and made them assess the reputational, security and financial risks of their project, which in turn led them to "do more", including seeking dedicated technical support. Also, following the backlash against international organizations operating in Rakhine in 2014 (mentioned above), many of them have increased conflict-sensitive measures, including conducting more conflict analysis and stakeholder consultations, using more rigorous and transparent selection criteria, and investing more in technical resources and staff training.

Finally, for many development organizations, the motivation has come from seeing their efforts bear fruit, and not only positively impact peace and conflict dynamics, but also increase efficiencies and sustainability. For example, one conflict expert in a multilateral agency reported that an otherwise sceptical team of livelihoods sector specialists and project managers came round to the benefits of a conflict-sensitive approach when they saw how peacebuilding

strategies (e.g. dialogue, exchanges, etc.) were resulting in stronger participation and interaction from the communities, which in turn was enabling the smooth implementation of 'hardware' (e.g. infrastructure construction, vocational training, etc.) activities.

## 2.2

### Programme management

The second section of this report follows the integration of conflict sensitivity into the different steps of a typical project management cycle. Each key project management stage includes an introductory explanation of what the task typically involves, both from general project management and conflict sensitivity perspectives.

#### 2.2.1 Conflict analysis

##### What does this task involve?

Conducting a structured conflict analysis and regularly updating it throughout all stages of the project cycle to inform the way interventions are designed, implemented and monitored, is the cornerstone of conflict sensitivity.

Conflict analysis takes a systematic approach to:

- Understanding the background and history of the conflict.
- Identifying the causes of conflict.
- Identifying all the relevant groups involved.
- Understanding the perspectives of these groups and how they relate to each other.

In some situations, it may be too sensitive to talk of conflict analysis. Using the broader term 'context analysis' can help to overcome this challenge; however, it is important to differentiate between a context analysis that examines a broad array of social, economic, political



and cultural issues and one that specifically seeks to understand conflict.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of process, best practice emphasizes maximizing participation and gathering local perspectives. Triangulation is also central to conducting analysis, where perspectives and accounts will vary considerably. It is also good practice to make the analysis findings available to those who contributed to it, both to validate the results and to close the feedback loop. This also helps to avoid the frustration that local stakeholders and communities experience when consultations are unidirectional and feel 'extractive'.

### Key findings

Political and conflict dynamics are highly fluid and localized. Organizations can struggle to remain informed. Several interviewees noted a dearth of good quality, regular conflict analysis as part of local and community development programming in Myanmar. Organizations tend to do sectoral assessments focused on their particular sector, such as livelihoods, health or education, without an overarching context assessment.

In other instances, organizations rely on macro level analysis (e.g. country level, state/regional level, etc.) or project-level analysis (i.e. immediate project environment at village and village tract level) and miss out on understanding subnational and local-level dynamics (e.g. intra-ethnic dynamics, dynamics between specific local-level government actors, between CSOs and EAO representatives, etc.). Some conduct conflict analysis at the inception of a project but not periodically throughout project implementation. Even where conflict analysis is done at the start, some interviewees noted that it was "copy, and paste"; that is, recycling old analyses. Organizations doing regular analysis were those implementing large-scale projects who either had access to dedicated conflict advisors or resources to commission such analysis.

If conflict analysis is done for local and community development projects, it is only done for projects operating in ethnic states or for areas deemed 'conflict affected'. In fact, some organizations have only commissioned conflict analysis when they have expanded into explicitly conflict-affected areas. This reflects the tendency to see Myanmar's conflicts through an exclusively 'ethnic' lens, while broader state-society conflicts, localized conflicts and other dynamics, such

<sup>8</sup> Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, 'How to guide to conflict sensitivity', 2012, p. 4.



**Box 1****Conflict analysis can set conflict sensitivity trend in projects, positive or negative**

A development organization conducted a DNH analysis at the inception of a large-scale local development project that was to be implemented by a consortium. Other consortium partners were not involved in the process and did not find the analysis to be of sufficient quality, so they opted to ignore it. From this point, the project didn't put in place mechanisms to update the DNH analysis or monitor the project's interaction with the context. Investing in quality analysis up front, and involving partners and other key stakeholders in the process, can be essential to generate the insight and buy-in needed to sustain a focus on conflict sensitivity.

as inter-religious, gender-based or intergenerational conflict, and structural inequality and discrimination, are usually overlooked.

Some interviewees observed that conflict analysis is often undertaken by organizations based on a preconceived idea of the conflict, which means they miss out on important dimensions. Interviewees working in Rakhine state felt that many organizations analysed 'the Rakhine conflict' at the *horizontal* level, i.e. as an intercommunal conflict between ethnic Rakhines and Muslims living in Rakhine state without fully taking account of the *vertical* issues, such as the historical marginalization of both communities by the central government, the conflict between communities and authorities and the wider governance challenges that influence intercommunity relations. A second example is in South-Eastern Myanmar, where several interviewees felt that the conflict analysis focused too much on the dynamics of the largest actors (e.g. relations between Government and EAOs) and missed out on the nuances, such as the dynamics between ethnic subgroups, religious groups, and so forth.

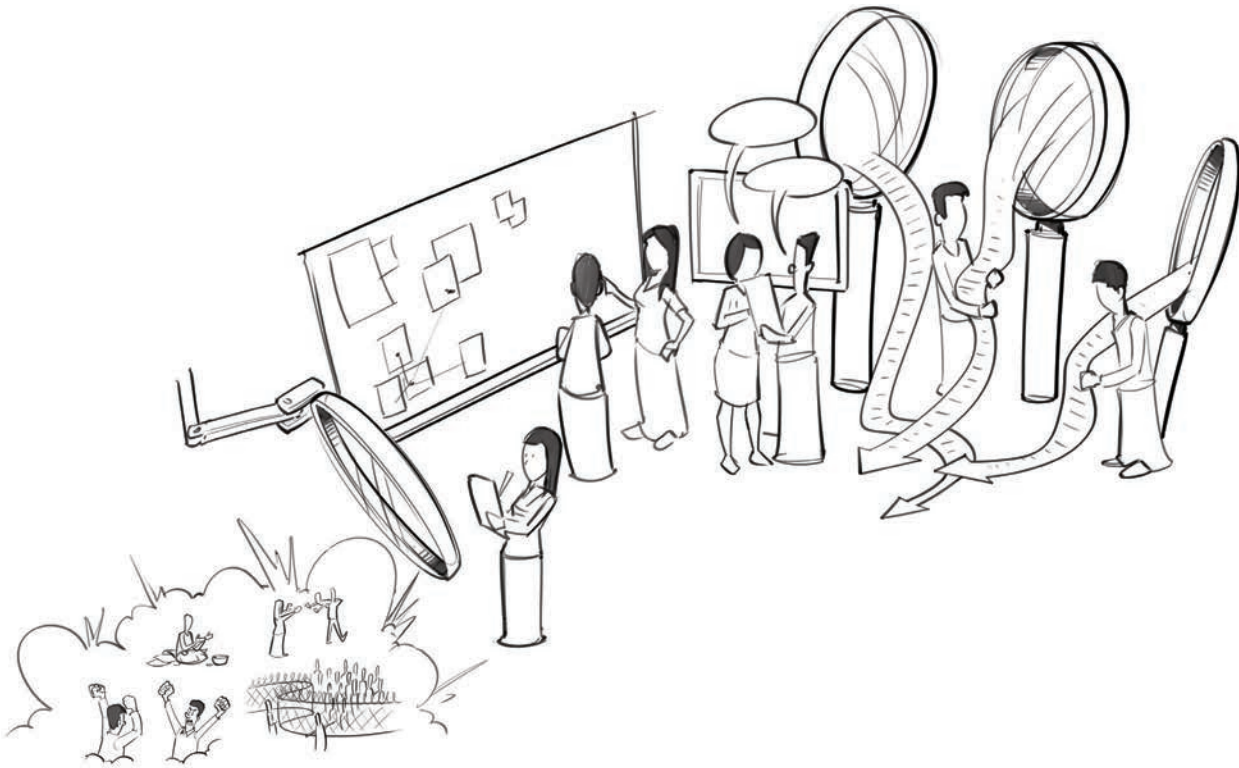
Who conducts the analysis, how it is conducted and who is involved are as important as the quality of the analysis. Best practice takes into account views from all key identity groups in terms of gender, ethnicity, age,

religion, socio-economic status, geography, as well as from all key stakeholder groups, such as community, government, EAOs, civil society, private sector, etc. This not only ensures that all perspectives are represented and that information is triangulated, but participatory conflict analysis also provides an opportunity for interaction, dialogue and trust-building with and between project stakeholders.

In Myanmar, one challenge is reaching communities in ethnic areas. In some areas, such as Kachin and northern Shan, the risk of violence is too acute for extensive field analysis. Some interviewees felt that Government and EAOs can function as gatekeepers, making it difficult to discern local people's perspectives and the extent to which decision makers reflect their views. In the face of political and physical barriers to information, interviewees felt that it was important for organizations to invest time and resources to explore innovative strategies, such as technology and social media, to ensure that the conflict analysis has sufficient reach and representation.

**Box 2****Participatory analysis can be an engine for empowerment**

Participatory context analysis, led by beneficiaries themselves, can be a source of ownership and empowerment in community development processes. Two projects reviewed reported the benefits of the Grass Roots Organizational Capacity Assessment method. Members of community committees, organizations or groups rate their own capacity in different standard dimensions, including finance, management, leadership, external relations, etc., along standard criteria. The assessment is repeated several times over the project duration to track progress from a baseline to an endline. One community based organization in Rakhine elected to put up their baseline and tracking scores on the walls of the public building they used for meetings, to demonstrate accountability to the community and to motivate themselves to keep improving.



### Box 3

#### Understanding cross-cutting dimensions, such as information flows, can enhance context analyses

A peacebuilding organization ran a study of information circulation in communities in different areas of Myanmar and how this shaped conflict and peace dynamics. They found that word of mouth and local influencers (i.e. people with power) were often dominant sources of information. It also explored the relationship between information flows and violence. It was noted that people generally believe rumours, and that while rumours don't necessarily trigger violence, they create an enabling environment for violence. Analysing how people share information and communicate can be very relevant for local and community development projects, especially when designing how the project will raise awareness or advocate on issues.

### 2.2.2 Conflict-sensitive project design

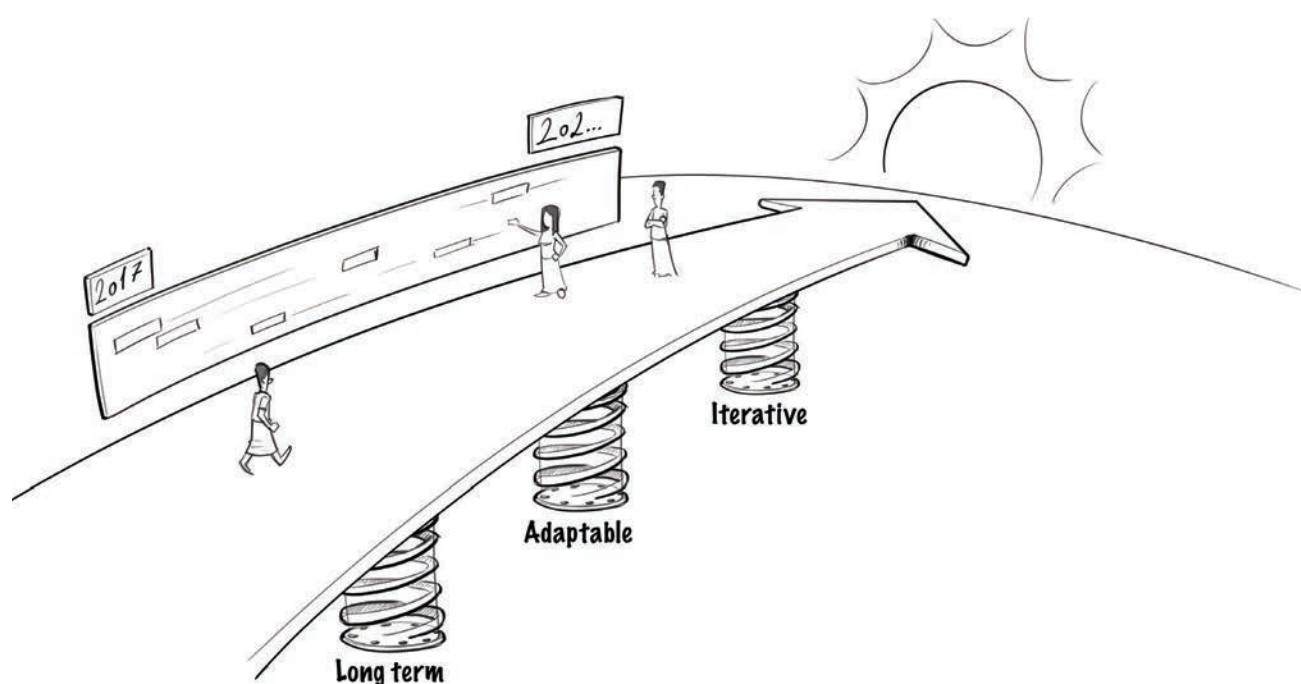
#### What does this task involve?

Integrating conflict sensitivity at the design stage involves using findings from the conflict analysis to inform all key parameters of the project, such as:

- What the project will do.
- Who will implement it and for whom.
- Who the beneficiaries/participants will be.
- Where the project will be implemented.
- When the project activities will take place.
- How the project will be implemented.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to integrate measures to ensure DNH in each of these dimensions. It is also good practice to reflect contributions to peacebuilding in the design wherever possible. Some dimensions of project design that are particularly important for conflict sensitivity include project structure (essentially its timeframe and implementation modality), beneficiary targeting

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 8.



## Long-term, adaptable and iterative programming for conflict sensitivity

decisions, the strategic integration of peacebuilding within the development project design and the project design process—who is involved, when and how.

Good practice in terms of conflict-sensitive project design processes emphasizes a high degree of participation, ideally with key design decisions being generated bottom-up from beneficiaries and key stakeholders (including relevant government and EAO authorities), and deep consideration of context. In transitional contexts, particular attention is needed to the politics of who is involved, when and how, in order to secure both the input and engagement, or formal approval, of key people and agencies.

### Key findings

Interviews for this study confirmed that the traditional project structure, with relatively short-term, time-bound, pre-designed and rigid initiatives, is unsuitable in any context, and in particular for Myanmar. This is because of the fluid context and the time it takes to build the requisite trust with key stakeholders. Interviewees from organizations noted that in their experience, meaningful consultation and designing projects with

key stakeholders requires building trust, and that this trust-building takes significant time. Given this, as good practice some agencies are factoring in considerable lead-time, often about a year or more, at the beginning of a project, specifically for consultations and building relationships with local stakeholders.

The study reinforced the importance of consultative and participatory project design for both its development and conflict sensitivity value. The good practice is to maximize community decision-making in the project design process and to build this into the entire project cycle. There was strong criticism that standard practice brings local communities and CSOs into the process too late, when the project's broad parameters have already been designed and agreed upon at higher levels. One organization interviewed had inadvertently left out a key ethnic stakeholder in its consultations on project design, who then publicly criticized the project, compelling the organization to put the project on hold. Building strong relationships and trust with government, EAOs, local civil society and the community at design stage is crucial for local and community development projects to progress.

**Box 4****Using participatory design to adjust projects**

During consultations, one organization heard concerns from local civil society about the potentially harmful impacts of its planned infrastructure project. Civil society was also critical about the organization's lack of awareness about these impacts and the context more generally. In response, the organization designed two additional initiatives, one to strengthen civil society participation and the interaction between Government, civil society and communities in the project, and two, to implement a number of small community development projects based on community-identified needs that would complement the bigger infrastructure project.

This approach had its challenges. For example, it took time to build relationships and consult with communities and civil society, and the identification and implementation of the smaller complementary community development projects were not fully in sync with the swift and structured rollout of the large-scale project. Also, the organization had to manage community expectations, as it was not feasible to meet all their identified needs and project ideas.

This experience has, however, made the organization rethink its approach and take steps to mainstreaming a context-sensitive approach into all its work. This has included integrating conflict and political economy analysis into its project development processes; developing and sharing guidelines for engagement and consultations with different key stakeholder groups; developing standard project participation plans; working in clusters to enable linkages between different sectoral projects; and providing training for staff and government partners on conflict sensitivity. The organization is also developing a new mechanism for receiving community grievances. These efforts have benefitted from both strong support from senior managers as well as in-house technical expertise. The Myanmar office hopes this practice will be replicated in other country offices.

Interviewees shared that organizational hierarchies and short timelines for project design greatly limit their ability to design projects that are meaningfully consultative and participatory. For some, funding is a constraint, where donors expect elaborate designs, including conflict analysis, but don't themselves invest in design processes and place unreasonably short timelines for project design and proposal submissions. Experience has highlighted the need to balance consultative project design with creating expectations and over-burdening beneficiaries and stakeholders. Concerns over excessive consultation include feasibility and formulation exercises, which raise community expectations but don't result in any support. Good practice is to use a staged process, where deeper consultations are undertaken only when broad funding and geographic parameters have been provisionally established. Participatory processes at any level can be subject to elite capture, which poses a conflict sensitivity challenge. Good practice is to mitigate this by understanding and analysing power dynamics and networks as part of the conflict analysis.

Project designs are most conflict sensitive when they are iterative and when there is maximum scope for adaptation. Here, donors and funding partners play a key role. For example, one organization implementing a large-scale recovery project in the South-East shared that its donors had demonstrated a lot of flexibility to changes in project strategies (and related project extensions and budget revisions). This, in turn, enabled the organization to respond more effectively to shifts in the conflict context and to support the needs of refugees, IDPs and returnees as they evolved.

Where ongoing projects expand into new or conflict-affected areas, parameters about what is feasible will change, which will require a design review, update or redesign. For example, one community development project reviewed its design when expanding to Kayah State. It made numerous adjustments to both its programming and operational approaches. The project added activities that would deliver more short-term results alongside longer-term development gains, in order to overcome distrust and build community motivation and support. It also factored that its planned

results would be comparatively modest in the South-East due to more challenging conditions, and that delivering these results would take much longer and be more expensive.

Beneficiary and geographic targeting is one of the more challenging considerations of conflict sensitivity during project design. In a context such as Myanmar, where there are long-standing grievances related to identity-based discrimination, decisions around the distribution of project benefits can be highly sensitive. The good practice is to ensure that these decisions are well-informed by strong conflict analysis, that they are objective, transparent and well-communicated, and where possible coordinated with other complementary interventions.

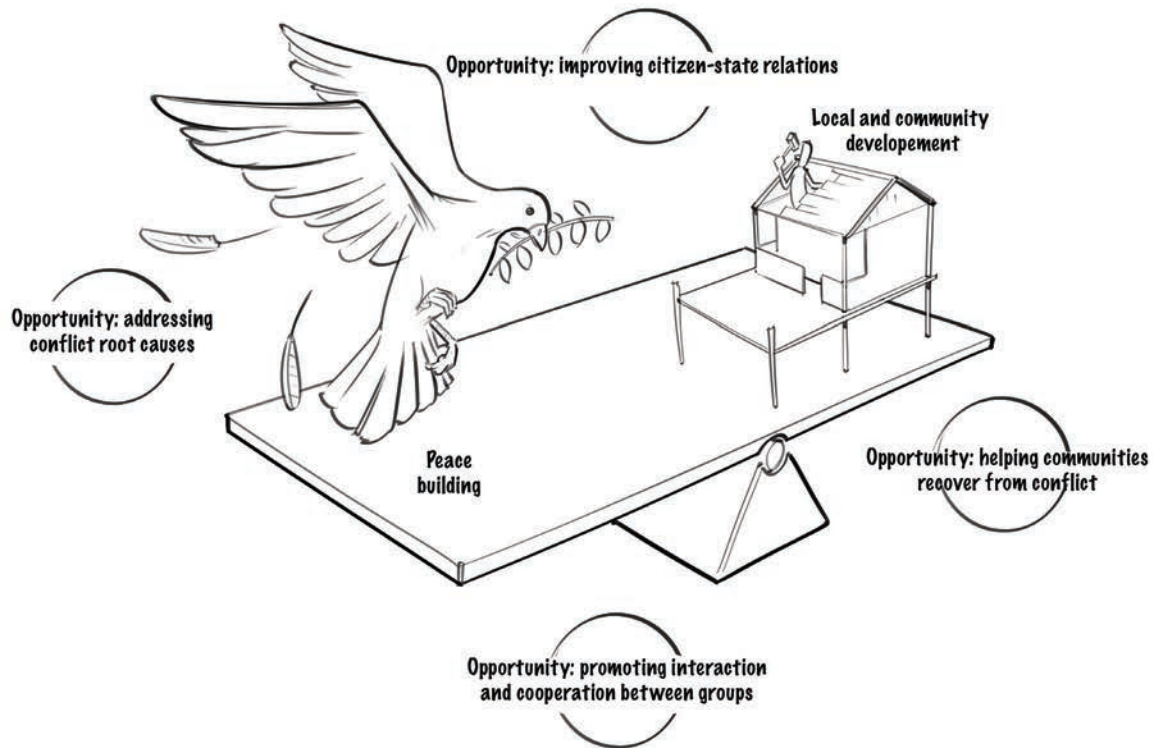
One community development project has sought to run a transparent, evidence-based and participatory process of selecting townships for its intervention based on poverty criteria. Its government counterpart organizes workshops in each state or region, during which participants identify two to three townships based on poverty data. These workshops also allow participants to contribute their own knowledge, which is important since poverty data may not always reflect the most current reality on the ground. At the local level, the agency facilitates community meetings, where villagers select beneficiaries based on poverty and vulnerability criteria using consensus-based decision-making. Alternatively, another large-scale community development project seeks to achieve full area coverage in each target township.

In response to the backlash against perceived bias towards aiding Muslim communities living in Rakhine state (mentioned above), many organizations adopted a 50:50 ratio of support to Muslim and ethnic Rakhine communities; however, many shared that this ratio has proved to be problematic, as it does not allow for a fully evidence- and needs-based identification of locations and beneficiaries. As an alternative, some organizations are starting to tailor their targeting as the situation demands. For example, one agency adopted a village cluster approach for delivering assistance to returnee populations, with assistance covering a combination of return villages (in this instance predominantly Muslim) and surrounding/adjacent villages (both Muslim and Rakhine), allowing to balance supporting the most vulnerable with sensitivity to grievances and perceptions of fairness.

Interviewees also discussed the relative strengths and weaknesses of engaging in severely conflict-affected areas of Myanmar, particularly those that are under mixed administration, that are contested or under EAO control. There is a strong incentive to prioritize these areas, as many are long affected by conflict and, as a consequence, have substantial human development needs. At the same time, development organizations are deterred by the operational complexities, such as remoteness and access, multiple layers of approval, and safety risks. Some interviewees shared that they are wary of being criticized by some EAOs and CSOs about investing in “too much visible development” ahead of significant progress in the peace process. For government organizations, it is unfeasible to implement local or community development projects in these areas due to contested authority, distrust and insecurity. Notwithstanding the difficulties, interviewees across the board agreed that efforts should be made to implement local and community development programmes in conflict-affected areas and that avoiding these areas meant furthering their exclusion and underdevelopment.

Often, local and community development projects are designed to tackle structural inequality or historic marginalization, and therefore they deliberately target specific geographic locations, groups or populations. In these instances, they inevitably risk being perceived as biased and creating tensions between groups. Development organizations have a difficult trade-off between designing programmes that first, Do No Harm, but at the same time are evidence-based and tackle the root causes of conflict. Where such a trade-off is necessary, the good practice is to ensure that targeting decisions are backed by a strong rationale and evidence and that there are robust communication and outreach strategies in place to inform and engage target beneficiaries and stakeholders. Additionally, organizations should have strong beneficiary feedback mechanisms in place (see section 2.2.6 on M&E below), that allow them to detect any unintended consequences early and take corrective or risk mitigation measures. Furthermore, the good practice is for organizations to explore complementary interventions that benefit broader populations. This can also be done by coordinating and synchronizing activities with other organizations that are working in the same target areas and that are targeting other groups or broader populations.

## Achieving peace outcomes



### Integrating peacebuilding objectives

In terms of design decisions, many organizations in Myanmar are already leveraging local and community development projects to achieve peacebuilding aims, though many interviewees, notably staff with conflict expertise, felt there was significant potential and opportunity to do more.

In terms of approaches, some organizations are improving the status of excluded groups and those facing discrimination, as a way of achieving peacebuilding through local and community development. For instance, some organizations are supporting women's savings and loan groups, ensuring 50% female representation in village committees and stipulating equal pay for both sexes in cash-for-work schemes, because they find that economic benefits improve women's confidence and status in society, giving them access to and influence over broader decision-making. A female member of a village development committee interviewed recounted how her participation in a women's savings group had given her the confidence and acceptance from both the villagers and local-level government to be elected "head of ten households", a leadership position often held by men.

Local and community development projects also provide a vehicle to strengthen the interaction and trust between the State and communities. Some interviewees noted that often local level government officials avoid interacting with communities because they feel they have no resources to offer them and no decision-making or problem-solving authority. In order to tackle this, one project in Rakhine state involved local-level government extension staff in community trainings, and mobilized them to co-deliver the project's extension support to local farmers and fishermen, resulting in more constructive government-community relationships. This improved relationship was demonstrated when government officials returned to to consult them on developing a new state law on coastal and inland fishing. Community groups interviewed also noted how their participation in project mechanisms had increased their interaction with local-level government officials and equipped them with skills to lobby for their needs, for example, through formal requests. Others noted, however, that despite increased interaction, they were still largely mistrustful of Government.

There are conflict-sensitivity risks to strengthening community influence over governance. One organization is currently preparing to pilot the use of community scorecards for government service delivery, which would allow communities to rate their satisfaction with local level services; however, project staff are aware that—notwithstanding the long-term benefits—in the short term this initiative can also generate resistance from Government and erode community-government relations. Another project seeking to empower communities and CSOs to advocate for local land and education rights, and challenge corruption, noted that participants faced risks from powerful, well-networked authority figures. The project is using a number of mitigation strategies, including ensuring people operate in groups rather than as individuals and are closely accompanied by the project implementer. It is important to note, however, that in contexts where individuals and organizations could be placed at risk after the ‘cover’ or protection afforded by a project or development organization is gone, accompaniment needs to continue beyond project implementation.

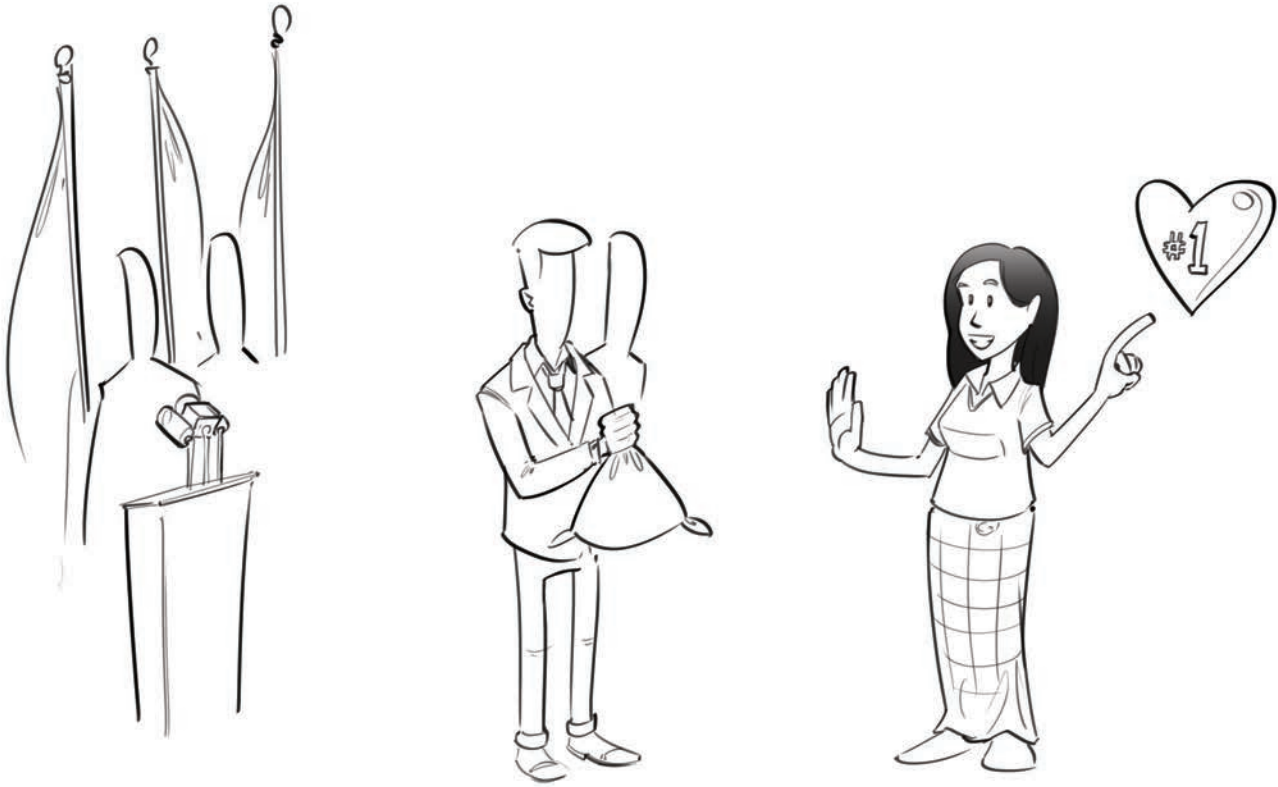
Many organizations shared strategies to promote social cohesion among divided community groups through local and community development initiatives. Different strategies have been tried in different areas with varied results. Many interviewees highlighted the pitfalls of ‘contact theory’, the belief that simply increasing interaction between hostile groups improves mutual perceptions, understanding and trust. Experience shows that divided groups may interact with each other for personal benefit in a purely transactional manner, with no improvement in their attitudes or behaviour to each other. In Rakhine state, where peacebuilding strategies are often mainstreamed into recovery and development projects, ethnic Rakhine and Muslim communities already interact with each other or are open to doing so when required, or facilitated by development agencies; however, these interactions don’t necessarily result in improving negative stereotypes or intercommunal relations. In fact, some interviewees highlighted the risk of inadvertently worsening relations through increased contact without any accompanying measures to facilitate improved relations. The good practice here is to design socio-economic activities that allow for deeper collaboration and gradual trust-building and create a stake for continued coexistence and interdependence beyond the project, such as intercommunity organizations, jointly identified and

owned infrastructure and intercommunity business and enterprise initiatives. One community group in Kayah state described how a local infrastructure project had led to increased collaboration with neighbouring villagers of different faiths with whom they had previously had no contact. This led to the institution of inter-village socializing, with Shan people attending Christian celebrations and periodic football matches. It is, however, important not to overstate the possible potential impact of such initiatives on social cohesion and peacebuilding, as these are also subject to wider political and conflict dynamics that are beyond the remit of local and community development programming.

While there is potential for local and community development programming to be peace supportive by tackling conflict causes and drivers and contribute to peace (the maximalist end of conflict sensitivity), it is important to note that not all programmes are mandated or equipped to do so. There are many effective conflict-sensitive local and community development programmes that stay within the minimalist end of conflict sensitivity (e.g. DNH), which do not aim to build peace. The potential to move through this spectrum (minimalist to maximalist) must be carefully assessed against the context, organizational mandates, stakeholder views, planning and implementation timeframes and capacities.

#### **Box 5** **Designing collaborative development initiatives to bridge civil society divides in Rakhine**

In Rakhine, one local development project aims both to improve accountability in local development activities and to build the capacity of local CSOs. There are considerable divisions within local civil society, which to some extent reflect wider social divisions. The project undertook a stakeholder mapping of local CSOs to understand their members, profile, aims and relative positions. They then devised specific engagement strategies. For example, they grouped CSOs with similar objectives and asked them to decide on collaborative initiatives. One group is now monitoring how local authorities are administering school reconstruction and scholarship programmes.



### 2.2.3 Institutional set-up

#### What does this task involve?

The institutional set-up of a project includes its management structure and systems, including human resources, operating policies and guidelines, financial systems, oversight structures, and all other aspects governing project operations.

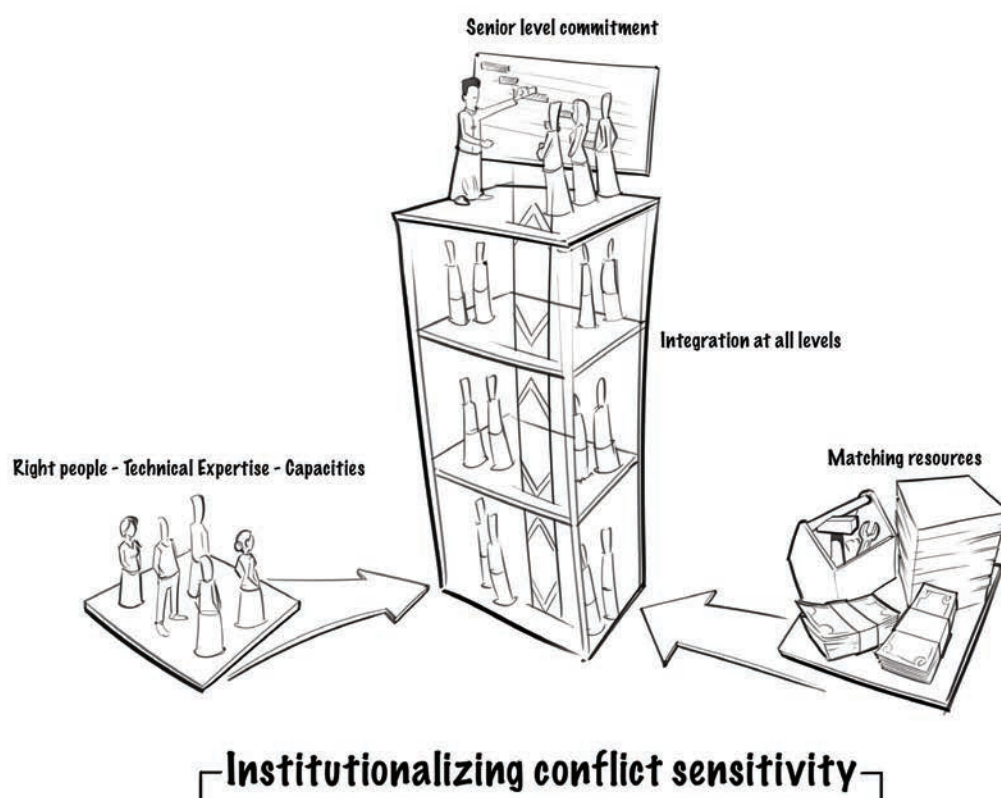
Project operations interact with the context in sensitive ways, through human interaction, decision-making and financial flows. Conflict-sensitive project operations need to be responsive to changing conditions or sudden developments to avoid doing harm or missing vital opportunities.

How seriously conflict sensitivity is taken at the project level is usually determined by how seriously it is taken at the organizational level. Ultimately, for conflict sensitivity to be practiced properly throughout a project, it needs to be fully integrated into the institution's programming and operations systems.

Practical examples of this might include:

- A partner selection process that builds in due diligence around conflict. Considerations, to name a few, include a potential partner's positioning and reputation *vis-à-vis* conflict stakeholders, existing experiences and relationship within a conflict-affected target area and the extent to which conflict-sensitivity measures are integrated into its own systems and staffing.
- Staff recruitment policies and processes that mitigate potential biases or structural disadvantages, or that require particular skills or experience that facilitate working smoothly with target communities. This might include possession of local language skills (especially important for field positions) or having values that reflect the project's aims.
- Procurement systems that guard against corruption or patronage and enable fair access to different groups and organizations, to ensure structural barriers are lowered and resource transfer is bias-free. This might include, for instance, considering in which languages or by what methods procurement notices are advertised, clear communication of selection criteria and processes, and potentially considering balancing procurement across different identity groups if a high premium is placed upon this in the local context. Another dimension might be conducting due diligence on the subcontractors,





suppliers, and connected individuals and organisations to ensure they do not compromise the project or agency's integrity.

- Considering the implications and risks around the location of field offices and branding of project assets, like cars. Both might communicate implicit messages about the project's position and role in the conflict context. Such physical aspects of the project, along with its staff, form the 'face' of the project and shape stakeholder expectations.

### Key findings

Many interviewees saw the institutional set-up, both at the project management and wider organisational level, as a 'make-or-break' area for conflict sensitivity in Myanmar. Senior decision makers need to fully support the integration of conflict sensitivity into projects, and match this with resources. Conflict sensitivity needs to be integrated into all levels of organizational and project decision-making. For example, one development fund has a conflict advisor sitting on its governance board, who is then able to influence strategic decisions. This is an exception in Myanmar. In most other instances, if organizations have internal conflict capacity, it is often at the advisory or technical levels only. Conflict sensitivity then becomes

the prerogative of designated staff who must invest considerable energy to advocate for it with managers and other staff, and must often "swim against the tide of institutional culture and time pressure".

A second factor with regard to institutional set-up, is the availability of technical expertise. Government departments consulted do not have dedicated internal conflict advisory capacity. Many of the bigger international development organizations interviewed do tend to have conflict advisors, though some noted the challenges associated with the project-based, short-term or advisory nature of their work means that their sphere of influence, especially at the strategic and organizational level, is limited. The scoping did not identify any conflict advisors based in the field full-time. Several people noted the tendency to recruit conflict advisors to projects after they have been designed, greatly limiting the scope for these individuals to influence the project. In interviews with these advisors, they shared that they were spread very thin across several projects. Though rare in practice, ideally each project needs a dedicated conflict advisor to fully integrate conflict sensitivity, including training, mentoring and advising other staff and partners. One large-scale community development project managed

**Box 6****Combining conflict-sensitivity expertise, influence and a multilevel approach**

One multi-donor trust fund has mainstreamed support for conflict sensitivity at multiple levels, and has a conflict-sensitive strategy with resources and staff dedicated to its implementation. It has a lead conflict advisor in place who has 20 years of experience on conflict issues in Myanmar. The advisor was brought on board early and made part of the decision-making board. This has meant that conflict considerations have had a real bearing on strategy, partner selection and fund management.

Flexibility has been a core principle of the fund management approach, and this has been coordinated with contributing donors, who all have conflict advisors to the fund. The fund maintains strong conflict analysis at the state/regional level, which is regularly updated.

At the implementation level, conflict sensitivity forms part of partner selection criteria and has been streamlined through the programme management cycle. The fund also provides capacity development support to partners on conflict sensitivity and on accountability, equality and inclusivity. This links to an annual capacity self-assessment processes on these areas, where partners report and are assessed on dimensions like degree of information sharing and transparency, participation and beneficiary feedback response mechanisms. The fund also encourages (and finances) the efforts of partners to develop their own capacities. Finally, it facilitates learning and exchange workshops on conflict sensitivity for partners every couple of months.

to secure flexible financing for conflict sensitivity and was able to fund a full-time conflict advisor for the project, along with complementary conflict-sensitivity activities. Several other organizations are procuring advisory services from conflict experts only when expanding into conflict-affected ethnic states. In the case of one international development NGO, the insights they gained from an external consultant prompted them to make significant adjustments to their set-up and strategy when expanding coverage to the South-East.

Given the importance of conflict and contextual knowledge and skills, many interviewees bemoaned the “tool-box”, “checklist” or “tick-box” approach that conflict sensitivity is sometimes reduced to. Interviewees emphasized that ultimately there is no substitute for expertise, whether internally or externally contracted, who (critically) have influence over decisions. Given the complexity of the challenges and need to intuit strategies and responses, institutional checks and systems alone cannot deliver the required quality of support.

Interviewees across the board noted the importance of applying a conflict-sensitivity lens to recruitment and staffing. There was general consensus on the importance of having national staff, especially at field level, who could engage effectively with local authorities and communities, and navigate cultural

dynamics and sensitivities. Several agencies, both national and international, commented that aspects of conflict sensitivity are instinctive for Myanmar staff. While they may not call it ‘conflict sensitivity’, they know how to navigate contextual challenges and are naturally sensitive and resourceful around political and social conflicts, having handled them for so long. Good practice is to ensure that staff speak the local languages, a considerable challenge in Myanmar, given the number of languages and dialects. Several interviewees noted the challenges of finding staff with the required education and skills. One agency consciously downgraded some field posts from ‘manager’ to ‘senior officer’ to attract a wider pool of applicants, because they believed that while staff capacities around functional responsibilities could be built, it was important to prioritize recruiting staff with the right language skills and from the target areas and ethnic communities. In other contexts, where identity-based conflicts are pronounced, organizations find it more appropriate to place non-local national staff in field-level positions, to maintain balance and avoid the perception of bias. For some others, the good practice is to pair staff from different backgrounds, again to ensure balance but also to model collaboration across divides. Several organizations noted the challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified staff for/in more remote or perceptibly ‘difficult’ field locations.

**Box 7****Bolstering community development outreach and coordination in ethnic areas**

One project expanding to conflict-affected areas has developed a range of steps to adapt its approach. The first key step was to undertake conflict analyses of all townships being considered for implementation, out of recommendations were made on whether and how to engage. In some cases, particular townships were considered too volatile for project implementation. In others, a range of recommendations on how to tailor the project modality were made and have been adopted, involving ongoing and substantive engagement with all stakeholders, including relevant EAOs at various levels: union, state, township and locally through community facilitators. The project also facilitated considerable consultations between Government, EAOs and the implementing partner agencies prior to engagement. Different modes of cooperation were then developed, depending on the context.

Flexibility regarding disbursement timings and overall timelines is also a key feature. The project is enabling villages in new project areas to opt in at different stages of the project cycle, to provide a chance for them to see it working in other areas and to then decide if they wish to participate. Practical steps are also being taken to further boost the inclusivity and transparency of project communications and coordination.

The project routinely holds large-scale inception workshops involving a range of stakeholders, including different levels of Government, civil society and village tract leaders. These inform civil society and community representatives of the project process and enable them to ask questions from Government. Building on this, the project is planning to repeat such workshops, also involving EAO representatives, throughout the project cycle, which will function as a collaborative information sharing and monitoring process.

Finally, the project is also paying considerable attention to language needs and sensitivities in ethnic areas, ensuring community facilitators can speak local languages wherever possible and that communities receive information in appropriate languages. The experience of implementing this approach so far in the South-East has been mixed, with many elements of success and some challenges. The project is drawing on this learning to refine its conflict-sensitivity approach overall and in new townships it engages in.

**2.2.4 Project implementation****What does this task involve?**

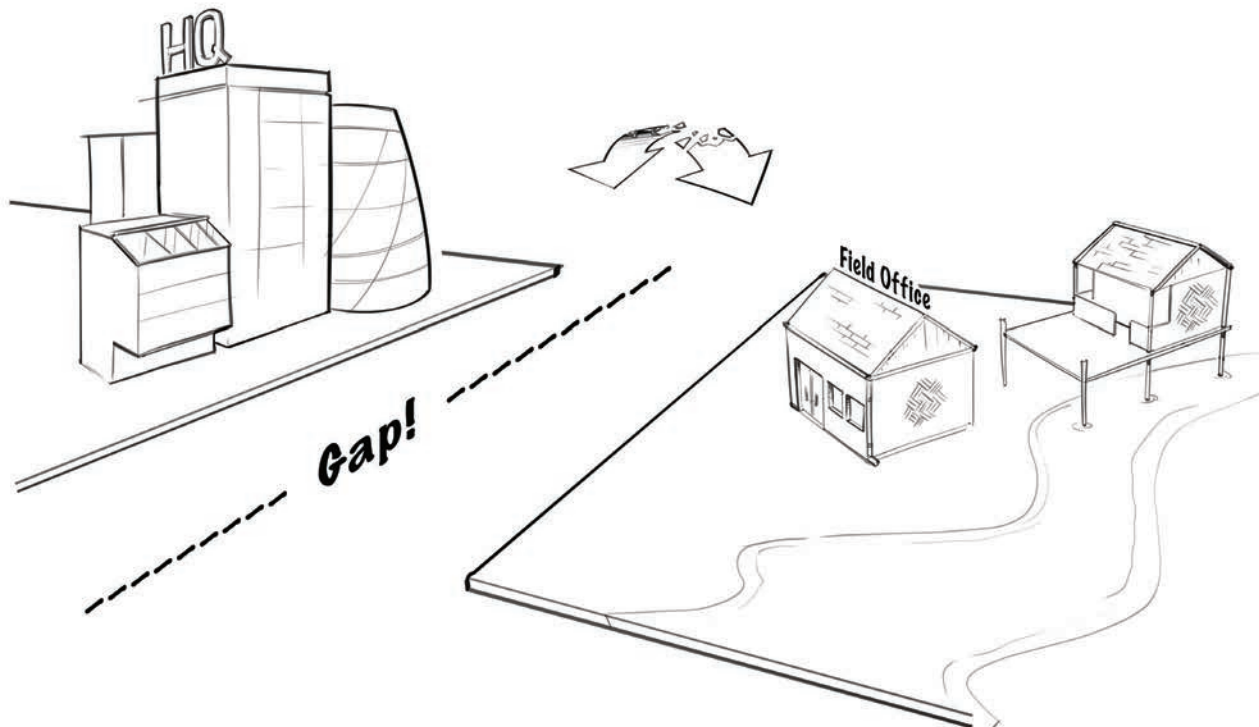
Conflict-sensitive implementation involves carrying out a project in a way that does not unintentionally cause, or exacerbate, tensions and capitalizes on opportunities to contribute to peacebuilding outcomes. The way that the implementing team manages relationships with actors who are both directly and indirectly affected by the project is central to conflict-sensitive implementation. The team needs to recognize the role and activities of these actors and seek, wherever possible, to build relationships with, and among, the different players for greater effectiveness.<sup>10</sup>

**Key findings**

With regard to implementation, good practice centres on the degree to which project structures facilitate information flow between different levels. The main risk is a gap between context knowledge at the field level and the power to influence decisions. The gap can be filled if and where field staff have frequent exchanges among themselves and with headquarters, and feel empowered and safe to report problems, challenges or contextual risks, and where project decisions are made in a responsive and efficient way that enables DNH. This requires project managers to seek updates and recommendations from staff at different levels. It also suggests that for projects to be conflict sensitive some degree of decentralized decision-making is needed. Several interviewees from government departments shared that it was important to broaden the risk assessment and risk management tools that

<sup>10</sup> Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, 'How to guide to conflict sensitivity', 2012, p. 12.

## Facilitating information flows



are traditionally used by government institutions to focus not only on risks to the project, but also on risks to the context posed by the project. This observation potentially provides an entry-point for conflict sensitivity within organizations that are more used to risk management tools and systems, where related risks and risk mitigation strategies related to conflict sensitivity can be incorporated into these existing processes.

Some interviewees felt that good conflict sensitivity practice centres on a culture of being updated on political and economic developments on a routine basis, rather than relying on analysis, indicators and reports. Given the longevity and evolving nature of conflict in Myanmar, information on demographics, physical infrastructure, and human development—as well as conflict dynamics and impacts—is likely to be partial or outdated as soon as it is available. This is especially true in the South-East, northern Shan and Kachin, where there has been considerable cross-border and internal population movement for decades. One organization developed village profiles when it began work in Kayah state, which captured when the last conflict occurred, the ethnic groups present, how many times villages have resettled, and so on. This revealed important contextual information otherwise not present in formal

subnational information, data and analysis, such as trust issues within villages recently reunited, conflicts between religious, ethnic or age groups, and trauma generated by violent experiences. This information then informed project design and decision-making, for example by providing clarity on the location and name of villages, since reality often differs from official records, with villages having moved or been abandoned. It was also factored into activity implementation, such as how community funds were disbursed and managed, and how coordination structures could involve EAOs or border guard forces present in specific locations.

As noted above, virtually all interviewees underscored the centrality of good coordination with Government, EAOs and CSOs in Myanmar. These in turn can contribute to improving coordination and relationship-building between these stakeholders beyond the project. One organization running a local tourism project in the South-East has the dual goal of delivering local economic benefits to address poverty and grievances and promoting dialogue and collaboration between Government, ethnic and private sector stakeholders, showing how local development initiatives can be harnessed to support peace outcomes.

Community participation has become a byword for conflict sensitivity, but often consultations are conducted at the design or inception stages without being integrated into the project management cycle.<sup>11</sup> Coordination with other development actors is especially important in Myanmar, where a multiplicity of (often new) actors work in the same locations on similar issues in a sensitive and complex environment. There were mixed perceptions among stakeholders on coordination in general. Government actors felt it was strong. Some agencies also felt there was good national and improving regional or state-level coordination, for instance through a working group on the South-East and, potentially, through the new Central Committee for the Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development in Rakhine state, which was established by the Government. Some have noted that humanitarian work tends to be better coordinated than development work. Others felt that coordination, particularly between larger development NGOs (both international and national) could be improved, and that there was a lot of competition and missed opportunities for learning and exchange. This was particularly noted with regards to conflict sensitivity. One interviewee from a multi-mandate international NGO felt that many similar organizations were developing conflict-sensitivity tools and staff training materials and undertaking conflict analyses of the same areas, with the same communities being consulted at the risk of their frustration, without sharing them, and so duplicating efforts. They felt state- and/or sector-based experience and lesson sharing on conflict sensitivity among development actors would be very beneficial. Another interviewee felt that the mandates and interventions of humanitarian and development agencies are increasingly converging and that better coordination between them is needed at the local level.

### 2.2.5 Building capacity for conflict sensitivity

#### What does this task involve?

Building individual and organizational capacity on conflict sensitivity is a multidimensional task that takes time. At the individual level, it means developing the knowledge, skills, attitude and experience to apply conflict sensitivity in development programming practice. At the organizational level, it involves

developing and institutionalizing the systems, structures, incentives and culture to the practice of conflict sensitivity so that it can be applied holistically and systematically in a sustained manner.

It is often thought that strengthening an individual's capacity amounts to training. While training plays an integral part, it is usually ineffectual alone. Long term mentoring and support are essential for skills to really develop and be applied. This might take the form of technical advice and backstopping when staff are facing challenges around conflict sensitivity at work, coaching or mentoring, and providing further or refresher trainings or learning opportunities, whether physical or virtual.

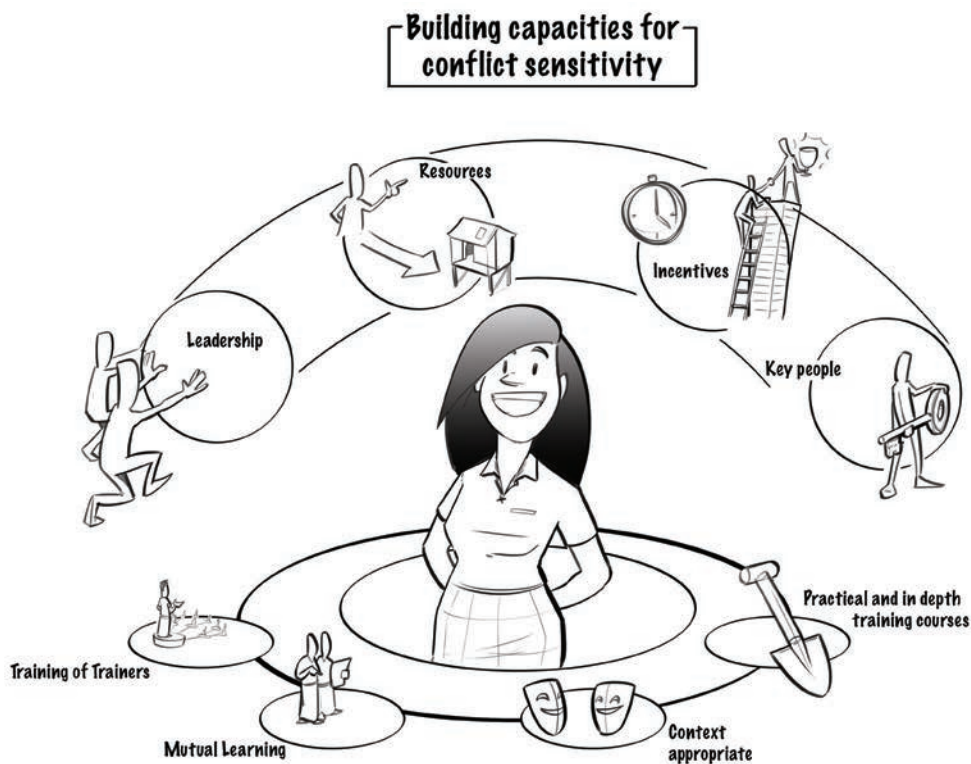
Individual capacity building on conflict sensitivity needs to be coupled with an enabling institutional environment. Institutional strengthening is typically challenging, as it requires several enabling factors to be a success. Key factors are much like those required for successful integration of conflict sensitivity into institutional project set-up, discussed above. Supportive leadership, resourcing, incentives or sanctions (such as objectives to meet in job descriptions or professional development processes), and organizational systems that enable rather than hinder working in a conflict-sensitive fashion are all required. So, too, are other key people who are also supportive of conflict-sensitive approaches, including donors, colleagues, partners and project stakeholders. Staff turnover and loss of institutional knowledge can typically be a barrier to sustaining conflict sensitivity in institutions, as can be competing internal incentives, such as time or funding pressures.

#### Key findings

Reflections by study participants on capacity development for conflict sensitivity included the need for more training, for training to be accompanied by mentoring and support for practice, for the need to institutionalize capacity development, and for stronger context specificity.

Several organizations involved in local and community development programming, from Government to national and international agencies are participating in trainings on different aspects of conflict sensitivity, from awareness of the general concepts, to how to conduct

<sup>11</sup> Saferworld, 'Saferworld briefing: A community-led approach to conflict sensitivity in Myanmar', 2016, p. 7.



a conflict or stakeholder analysis, to communication, dialogue and facilitation skills. Interviewees noted that these efforts are barely scratching the surface, both in terms of content and outreach.

Interviewees felt that the increased emphasis on exposing development workers to conflict sensitivity is positive, and that it is important to create the appetite for deeper learning through introductory trainings, though due to the somewhat piecemeal and 'projectized' approach to capacity development, some stakeholders and partners are in the habit of receiving multiple introductory trainings from different organizations, without benefitting from more advanced learning opportunities or support. In effect, most capacity development efforts seem to stop at the introductory level. Without both deepening and providing accompanying support to these efforts, they will not lead to a significant increase in conflict-sensitive practice. Another concern was that the model for capacity strengthening tends to be mainly one-way, from (international) expert to (national) learner, and that it is important to undertake capacity development where there is mutual learning, exchange and mentorship.

In terms of learning content and training methodologies, good practice confirms the need for practical rather than overly conceptual approaches, and calls for sourcing relevant and culturally sensitive

examples and case studies. Many respondents reported challenges around translating what are essentially Western technical concepts into a body of learning that resonated in Myanmar, both linguistically and culturally. Good translation is essential to avoid confusion. For example, several interviewees noted a tendency for Myanmar stakeholders to understand or interpret conflict sensitivity as relating to problems that need to be avoided, rather than as an approach to working constructively with/on conflict. Because of the conflict context, it is also important to frame the learning in a politically sensitive manner, in order to avoid alienating participants. Trainers also reported that experiential learning, for example engaging in role-play to understand power dynamics or practice new skills, such as conflict or risk analysis tools, has worked best in familiar contexts, such as their own day-to-day work.

Several interviewees shared learning and insights about how strengthening capacities for conflict sensitivity could impact change at individual, relational and institutional levels. Some felt that efforts are needed to help people reflect on themselves, help them to transform negative stereotypes and prejudices, and build individual skills for empathy, dialogue and problem solving, which are key building blocks for conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding capacities.

This also relates both to enabling people to view conflict as something ‘closer to home,’ i.e. as effecting their interpersonal and workplace relations, and to enabling people to consider the many dimensions and levels of conflict in the country, moving beyond the widespread assumption that conflict in Myanmar only refers to the ethnic armed conflicts. Good practice here is to encourage sharing professional or personal experiences to enable people to realize how conflict impacts their work or life, and why it is important to be able to navigate and mitigate it; to ensure time for clarity, dialogue and honest sharing; and to encourage participants to reflect on their own positions, interests and constituencies. One practitioner noted that civil society representatives will, unless challenged to think more critically about their own attitudes, behaviour and practices, frequently assume that they are ‘naturally’ conflict sensitive because they are not an official armed party to the conflict.

With regard to relational change, some organizations have seen results in promoting improved perceptions of and trust between different stakeholders by bringing them together for capacity development activities, though at the same time, this can come at the cost of reducing the space for self-reflection and sharing experience if stakeholders feel that they can’t afford to ‘lose face’ in front of other groups.

In terms of institutional change, most organizations interviewed noted the primacy of establishing buy-in for conflict sensitivity at senior levels, so that staff would be supported to both participate in training and apply their learning. To secure management buy-in and support, it is important to raise their own awareness levels, to demonstrate how conflict sensitivity can enhance organizational effectiveness, and to regularly provide feedback on results. For community development work, interviewees highlighted the importance of training field staff and partners who directly engage with local communities and stakeholders. One organization has started investing more deeply in staff learning on cross-cutting issues, including conflict sensitivity. For example, a key national staff member is being supported to undertake a two-year master’s course in conflict transformation, though it is important to acknowledge that it would be impossible to sustain this same level of opportunity for all staff. A couple of interviewees bemoaned that development courses

worldwide, both academic and those oriented towards practitioners, tend to not include modules on conflict sensitivity, and that this needs to change to enable its proper mainstreaming. One large-scale rural development project has invested in a training centre on core community development and agriculture skills, which includes soft skills, such as leadership, but is also discussing integrating some aspects of conflict sensitivity into its curricula.

## 2.2.6 Conflict sensitivity monitoring and evaluation

### What does this task involve?

Monitoring for conflict sensitivity, as part of a broader M&E plan, includes reflecting on the interaction between the intervention and the context. It involves three key elements:

- Monitoring the context.
- Monitoring the effects of the context on the intervention.
- Monitoring the effects of the intervention on the context.

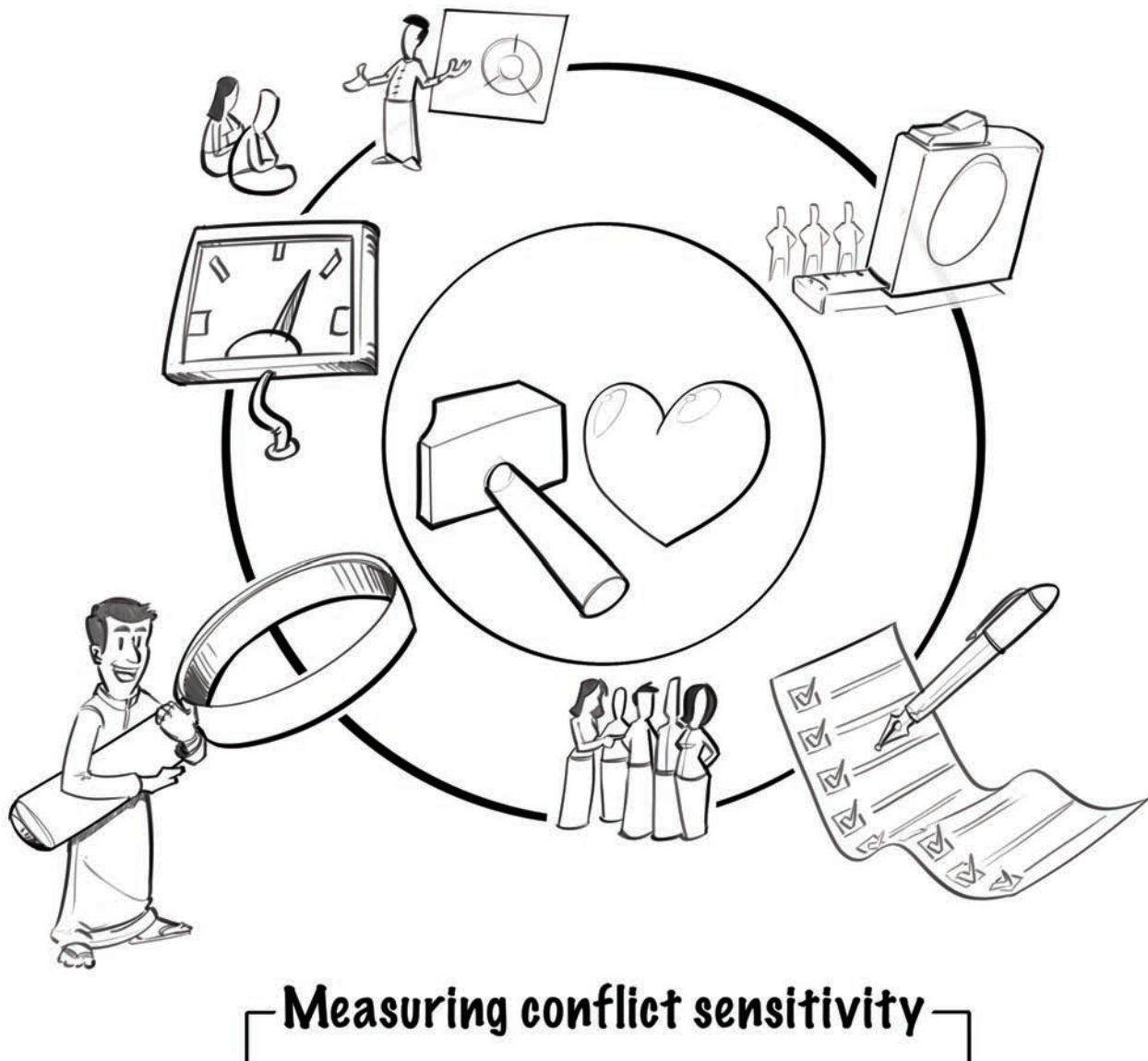
A key objective of monitoring for conflict sensitivity is to help the project to adapt implementation where conflict issues or changes directly relating to the intervention are identified.

Regarding the evaluation of conflict sensitivity, it is important to ensure that evaluations cover the direct project results as well as the interaction between the intervention and the context. It is also important to consider whether or not adaptations were needed and made as a result of conflict sensitivity.<sup>12</sup>

### Key findings

Generally, the M&E of conflict sensitivity is the weakest area of practice in Myanmar. Many organizations shared that they have weaker technical capacity for M&E, let alone for conflict-sensitive M&E. There were few examples of systematic measuring. Where conflict sensitivity M&E is being done, it is far more at input or activity levels; for example, counting participants attending a training rather than any changes in their attitudes or capacities as a consequence of their involvement.

<sup>12</sup> Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, ‘How to guide to conflict sensitivity’, 2012, pp.15–16.

**Box 8****Training of trainers and building connections**

One organization has recently completed an initiative strengthening the capacities of local-level stakeholders from Government, EAOs and civil society on social cohesion. The initiative adopted a training of trainers (TOT) approach for sustainability, with trainers also representing Government, EAOs and CSOs. The organization spent considerable time (six months of the 1.5 year project) consulting stakeholders and identifying varied locally rooted concepts of social cohesion from the perspective of different ethnicities, including the Bamar people. Training course modules were developed based around these concepts, and related themes such as win-win negotiations, rumour management, and duties and rights in good governance. Trainers rolled out six-day courses across three townships per state in six states. The TOT aspect was challenging. The training approach focused on experiential learning, which contrasts with the familiar rote learning style often used in Myanmar. The trainers needed substantial support to hold the space for dialogue comfortably, thus mentoring and support was provided to build their confidence. It was also initially challenging to convince different stakeholders to join a common training platform, but with advocacy this eased over time. The initiative has helped change individual perspectives and improved perceptions and trust between participating groups.



In Myanmar, there are also operational challenges to M&E, most acutely in conflict-affected areas. For example, access is difficult in some areas, for both political or security reasons. Interviewees shared that both ethnic organizations and local authorities can restrict their access to certain places or local communities, making it difficult for them to collect direct feedback from communities or to triangulate information supplied by other stakeholders. In the face of these challenges, one donor is exploring using technology for remote data gathering, but this remains at a very early stage. Some organizations shared that the difficulty of collecting M&E data to showcase results may discourage donors from supporting local and community development projects in conflict areas, though this was not reflected in the sample of donor views.

One interviewee cited the challenge of knowing when to evaluate impact from the viewpoint of conflict sensitivity. It is difficult to assess whether short-term positive benefits come at the risk of creating longer-term negative consequences and vice versa, and how these can be measured over time. For example, a livelihoods project may address a conflict grievance by reducing poverty and inequality in the short term, but it can also lay the roots for new conflicts by depleting

natural resources. Often, project implementation timeframes don't allow for organizations to assess and measure the longer-term impacts of their projects.

Another key dimension to M&E is how data, analysis and learning is fed back into project decision-making and implementation. This feedback loop is stronger at activity than at strategy level, in part because M&E remains predominantly a mechanism to meet reporting obligations and demonstrate success to donors.

There is also some apprehension about conflict-sensitive M&E. The study found that both governmental and non-governmental organizations were reluctant to collect and measure conflict data because they don't view themselves as peacebuilding organizations. Moreover, they view local and community development projects as being beyond the remit of peacebuilding in Myanmar. An agency currently working with government institutions to devise conflict-sensitive indicators for local and community development projects observed that officials were more at ease devising project-level indicators but were less comfortable with devising context-level indicators, which they viewed as beyond their mandate and as potentially sensitive.

### Box 9

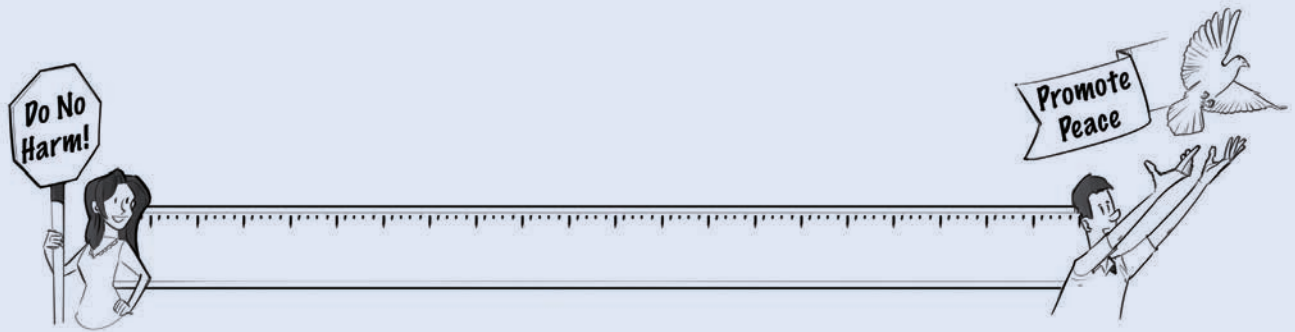
#### Gathering beneficiary feedback on local livelihoods support

One large-scale livelihoods project has a consortium partner dedicated to undertaking the project's M&E. Among the practices employed is a monthly qualitative phone survey of two project beneficiaries at activity level (female and male), selected at random. The beneficiaries are asked for their feedback on a range of aspects, including: the extent to which the right community members were selected to participate in the activity; the extent to which the activity suited villagers' priorities; the extent to which the community was involved in decision-making about the activity; and the extent to which the benefits of the activity are likely to continue. Respondents are asked to rank activities between 1 (unhappy) and 4 (very happy) and to explain each answer, and provide suggestions for improvement. This process is further complemented with an annual participatory social auditing process of the project using a community score-card methodology. Inclusive consultations are held over the course of a day with communities, importantly involving non-beneficiaries of the project as well as beneficiaries. Following a general orientation on the process, stakeholder/interest groups (women, men, youth, health workers, etc.) are formed, facilitated by neutral parties. They are asked to discuss specific aspects of the project, provide scores (using previously agreed upon rankings) and suggestions for improvement.

The implementer has found that not only are these processes helping to strengthen the project's activities, they are also contributing to improved beneficiary trust in the project and in development actors more broadly, which had been a challenge in the region overall. Community members note their appreciation that an impartial agency was seeking their opinions and making changes based on their feedback.

# 3.0

## Conclusions



Given the complex transition underway in Myanmar, local and community development initiatives need to be mindful of the risks of worsening grievances, structural discrimination and conflict divides at local, regional and national levels. While these risks are likely to be higher when working in conflict-affected areas, conflict-sensitive practice is not something to be utilized only when operating in conflict areas. Many forms of conflict exist in Myanmar, all of which need a conflict-sensitive approach.

Despite the challenges associated with operationalizing conflict sensitivity, it is imperative. DNH is a core humanitarian and aid effectiveness principle. Development effects resources, relationships and power, and all of this is linked to conflict dynamics. Leveraging development to contribute to peace is also 'aid effective', i.e. it is using development investments for maximum benefit.

Local and community development projects are not immune to the broader context and to higher-level peace and conflict dynamics. They can and do impact on Myanmar's peace process and democratic transition at the national level, and vice versa. Interventions that strengthen the authority or legitimacy of one actor or group may undermine stakeholder trust or participation in the peace process. Projects that ignore the wishes of local communities and their demands for a greater role in decision-making, or exclude some groups, can create conditions for new conflicts. Strong conflict analysis, inclusive consultations and good coordination with relevant stakeholders can help to mitigate these risks.

Notwithstanding the challenges, it is important to undertake local and community development projects in conflict areas, including those under mixed administration and EAO administered, to avoid deepening the suffering and marginalization of conflict-affected populations. Avoiding these areas should not be viewed as the default or 'safe' option. Local and community development projects must invest in strong technical expertise, undertake good conflict analysis, and invest the time and resources to consult and build trust with government, EAOs, civil society and

communities. Under these conditions, an extrasensitive approach is required.

Donors have a key role in both requiring and enabling conflict-sensitive practice in local and community development, by supporting flexible, iterative, politically responsive and long-term programming modalities; by enabling changes and modifications needed to respond effectively to changing conditions; and facilitating experience-sharing and learning.

Longer lead-in times (inception phases) are needed, particularly for large-scale or more complex projects, as is involving stakeholders early and intensively in project design. It is important to be ready to not implement projects if communities reject them. The chain of accountability for development in Myanmar is—like most contexts—almost entirely focused upwards, to donors and government, rather than downwards, to beneficiaries, and this needs rebalancing.

Beneficiary targeting can be contentious, especially where there's already intercommunal conflict or divisions. A balance should be struck between prioritizing need and vulnerability, and managing people's perceptions of fairness. It is important to avoid rigid formulas and ratios, and instead to emphasize equity. It is critical to avoid reinforcing 'us versus them' narratives through beneficiary targeting decisions. Robust transparency and communication strategies, as well as beneficiary feedback and accountability mechanisms, are required to mitigate potential perceptions of bias.

Local and community development initiatives should strive to support peace wherever possible. This might include project approaches that support dialogue and build trust across divides at community and/or political levels, or that empower traditionally marginalized people. It might also involve boosting transparency, accountability and citizen participation in and oversight of development decision-making. This will help to build a democratic culture and help local communities,

particularly marginalized communities, to trust authorities.

Undertaking good quality and regular conflict analysis for projects is critical. Given the vast regional and local differences in conflict dynamics across Myanmar, national and even state/regional-level conflict analyses, while necessary, are not sufficient. Regular context updates and analysis from field staff is a practical way of staying informed. Connecting these insights to project decisions is critical. This should be complemented by periodic analysis undertaken by technical and contextual experts, with resources needed for this factored in from the beginning.

In the Myanmar context, investing in project design processes is key. It is important to involve robust consultation with Government, EAOs, civil society and local communities before, not after, setting project parameters, and project implementation should not proceed without building the trust required with all stakeholders. Recommendations include sequencing and pacing activities, for example meeting pressing needs and delivering 'quick wins' for communities while working more cautiously and slowly to gain trust and build consensus around more difficult development issues.

Beyond the need to mandate and appropriately resource conflict sensitivity, success lies in how and to what extent the subject is integrated into all levels of an organization. This means reflecting conflict sensitivity in the structures, systems and staffing of a project, including ensuring an appropriate balance of identity and language skills in recruitment and being mindful of the political and reputational implications of operational decisions, such as partner selection or field office location. Robust technical advice on conflict sensitivity is required to navigate these tensions and decisions. Checklists are no substitute for technical and contextual expertise. At the same time, technical advice works effectively when there is management support for the importance of conflict sensitivity and for factoring this advice into decision-making.

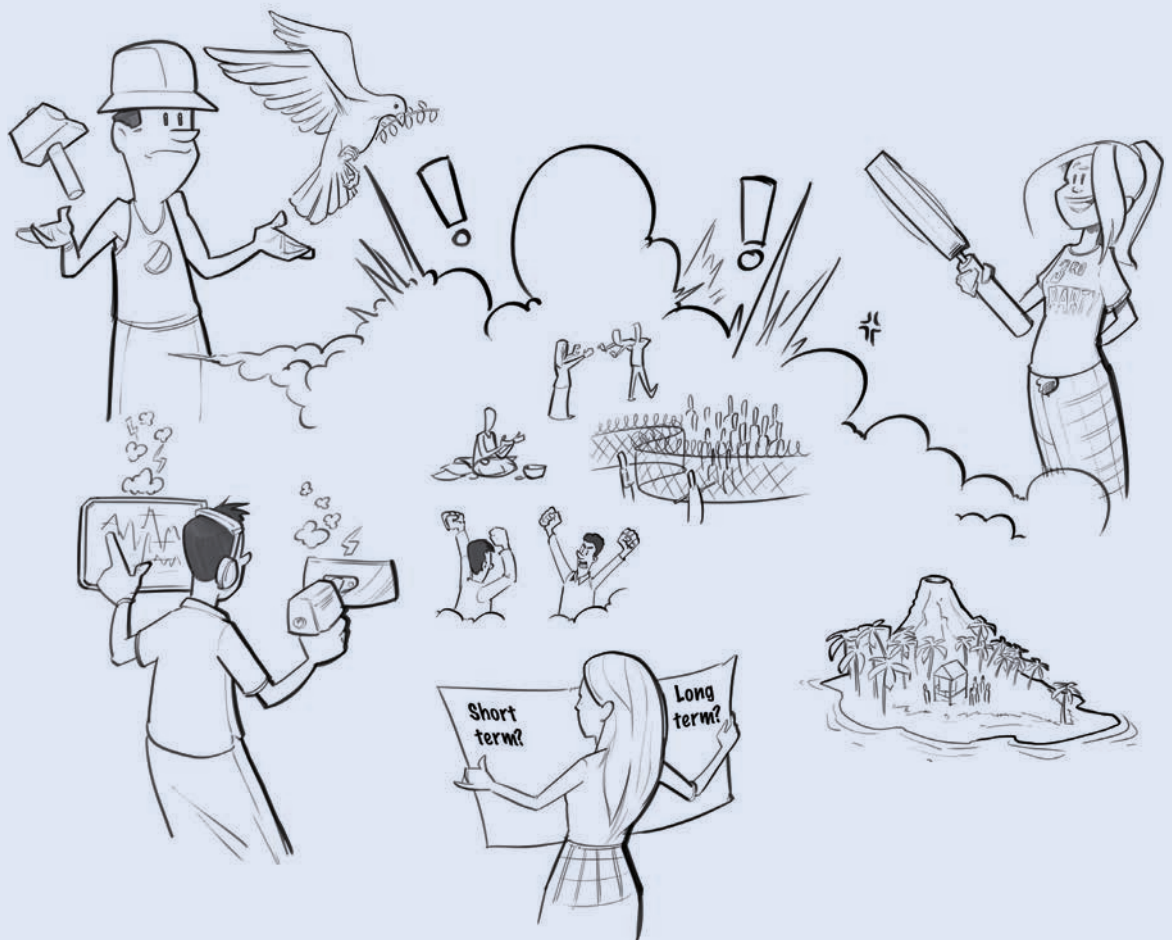
The experience of development actors in Myanmar highlights the importance of empowering and strengthening capacities of staff to monitor the context and share updates, and ensuring that managers are responsive to these updates and that they take corresponding actions, including adjusting work plans

and risk/mitigation logs regularly. Good practice is to add context updates into the standing agenda of project management and implementation meetings at different levels; proactively coordinate and share information within and outside the organization and sector; systematically facilitate exchanging and learning on conflict-sensitive approaches at the local and national levels; and put in place robust external communications to promote transparency and manage perceptions.

Capacity development efforts on conflict sensitivity are just beginning. Initiatives currently centre on introductory training courses rather than more in-depth and integrated support needed for people to test and apply learning, build skills and build confidence. Good practice centres on careful translation of conflict-sensitive language, sourcing local concepts and examples, and moving from one-off trainings to integrating curricula into established capacity development programmes and institutions.

Conflict sensitivity M&E is the least developed practice area in Myanmar. Agencies rarely apply interaction indicators, which track the project's interaction with the context. A dearth of general technical capacity on M&E and the difficulties in gathering data in unstable situations are challenges in this regard. While recognized as valuable, mechanisms for conflict-sensitive learning and knowledge-sharing are rare, and are confined to donors, United Nations agencies, INGOs and NGOs, with little or no interface with the State or EAOs.

# 4.0 Recommendations



## General

1. **Invest times and resources to develop more operational guidelines and tools for conflict sensitivity.** These will complement past and ongoing efforts to devise conflict-sensitive principles, and help organizations and staff at various levels to operationalize principles in a more concrete way.
2. **Review/assess the integration of conflict-sensitive thinking and practice within organizations.** Undertake an appraisal on conflict sensitivity strengths, gaps and entry-points and develop a strategy for strengthening conflict sensitivity across the institution. Ensure this has senior management backing and resources secured for implementation.
3. **Integrate peacebuilding approaches into local and community development projects across Myanmar,** to respond to conflict causes and to maximize on the entry-points provided by local and community development interventions.
4. **Invest in quality conflict analysis at local as well as regional and national levels, to inform project strategies.** Be ready not to implement, or to revise or halt programmes based on analysis. Build regular conflict analysis into programme frameworks and to project implementation cycles.
5. **Prioritize consultations with Government, EAOs, civil society and a cross-section of groups within communities.** Ensure that who you consult with and how you consult is informed by conflict analysis and a good understanding of power dynamics. Make consultations open ended and focused on identifying development needs and locally-owned response strategies. Respect local feedback to any proposals you make on development projects, but recognize that the ideas of those consulted can also be conflict-insensitive.
6. **Pursue local and community development projects that empower communities,** especially marginalized people, such as the poor, women and youth; build in strategies to improve relationships between

conflicting groups and to promote dialogue and accountability between communities and decision makers.

7. **Establish project management mechanisms and communication flows that allow the organization to assess the context and review strategy regularly.** Consider decentralizing project decision-making for greater responsiveness to context, balancing this with strong mentoring and support.
8. **Invest in staff professional development on conflict sensitivity through sustained training and mentoring.** Ensure that staffing decisions and recruitment are informed by conflict analysis. Ensure international and national staff are recruited with sensitivity to their values, skills (including language skills) and backgrounds.
9. **Invest in improving M&E of conflict sensitivity. Develop conflict and peacebuilding indicators for local and community development projects** to track potential harm and contributions to peace. It would be useful for organizations to develop an indicator framework that would help the aggregation of results across different projects.
10. **Put in place robust, accessible, confidential beneficiary feedback mechanisms** in all local and community development projects. This will alert organizations to any harm or emerging risks.
11. **Promote an organizational learning culture on conflict sensitivity,** including regular exchanges on challenges and innovation. Involve partners and other development and peacebuilding organizations to broaden opportunities for learning.

## Government

12. **Integrate conflict sensitivity into government local and community development planning and budgeting processes at national, state, township and local levels and into the screening of international development assistance, and private sector investment proposals.** In order to do

this, it would be useful to develop conflict-sensitive indicators that would help different ministries and departments involved in various projects to have a standard method of assessment and monitoring outcomes.

- 13. Systematically develop capacity on conflict-sensitive project management among government staff at the central and local levels**, including integrating conflict sensitivity into civil service training curricula.
- 14. Strengthen interministerial coordination, information-sharing and dialogue on conflict sensitivity**, so that different ministries and department can learn and share experiences and good practice.

## Civil society organizations

- 15. Monitor the practice of conflict sensitivity by donors, Government and NGOs.**

## Donors

- 16. Recalibrate funding approaches to support recipient organizations (government ministries, multilateral agencies, INGOs, NGOs, civil society, etc.) to design and implement conflict-sensitive programmes** by including conflict sensitivity in eligibility criteria; allowing lead-time for conflict analysis and consultative project design; allowing for longer implementation timeframes and post-project monitoring; being adaptive and flexible to change; and backing commitments with dedicated financial and technical resources.
- 17. Require and build in funding for technical advice on conflict sensitivity for all projects and programmes.** Explore ways this support might be clustered for efficiency. Encourage and facilitate learning and exchange between recipient organizations. Provide non-project-based funds for development organizations, both national and international, in Myanmar so that they are better able to institutionalize conflict sensitivity.

## 5.0

# Resources

Key resources drawn upon for this report and that may be useful for actors seeking to integrate conflict sensitivity into local and community development programming are featured below.





## 5.1 Reference documents

- For an English version of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, see: <http://www.peaceagreements.org/wggsite/downloadAgreementMasterDocument/id/1436>
- The Nat Pyi Taw Accord for Effective Development Cooperation, 2013, can be found at: [https://mohinga.info/static/docs/NPTA\\_Effective\\_Development\\_Cooperation.pdf](https://mohinga.info/static/docs/NPTA_Effective_Development_Cooperation.pdf)

## 5.2 Articles

A selection of relevant background reading on conflict sensitivity in development in Myanmar includes:

- Aron, Gabrielle, 'Reshaping engagement: Perspectives on conflict sensitivity in Rakhine state', CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2016.
- Denney, Lisa and Patrick Barron, 'Beyond the toolkit: Supporting peace processes in Asia' The Asia Foundation, 2015.
- Kempel, Susanne and Aung Thu Nyein, 'Local Governance Dynamics in South East Myanmar: An Assessment for Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)', 2014.
- Kim, Joliffe, 'Ethnic conflict and social services in Myanmar's contested regions', The Asia Foundation, 2014.
- Myanmar Peace Support Initiative, 'Lessons learned from MPSI's work supporting the peace process in Myanmar: March 2012–March 2014', 2014.
- PeaceNexus, 'Conflict sensitivity monitoring in Myanmar: Findings for OECD-DAC INCAF', 2016.
- Saferworld, 'Saferworld briefing: A community-led approach to conflict sensitivity in Myanmar', 2016.

## 5.3 Resource hubs

For information on Myanmar's conflicts and peace process, see Myanmar Peace Monitor:

[www.mmpeacemonitor.org](http://www.mmpeacemonitor.org)

For information and resources on conflict sensitivity in development internationally, see below:

[www.conflictsensitivity.org](http://www.conflictsensitivity.org)

This website, hosted by International Alert, is a product of the Practice of Conflict Sensitivity–Concept to Impact

project, which aimed to strengthen conflict sensitivity practice across a broad consortium of humanitarian, peacebuilding and development NGOs (2008–2012). The website contains a range of tools, resources and case studies.

[www.dmeformpeace.org/peaceexchange](http://www.dmeformpeace.org/peaceexchange)

This website is a global interactive platform for practitioners, donors and academics who aim to improve conflict-sensitive development programming by collecting and building knowledge, experiences, reflections and materials.

## 5.4 Resource packs

**Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, 'How to guide to conflict sensitivity', 2012.**

This guide is a product of the abovementioned Conflict Sensitivity Consortium project. It draws upon Consortium experience to illustrate real examples of integrating conflict sensitivity into different types and phases of development, humanitarian and peacebuilding programming. It aims to provide practical, user-friendly information for people who are focusing at project or organization-wide level, whether aiming for best practice or just beginning to work in a conflict-sensitive manner.

The guide is organized into six core chapters. Each contains a number of subthemes exploring the 'what', the 'why' and particularly the 'how' of conflict sensitivity.

**International Alert and Saferworld, 'Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding', 2004.**

This resource pack seeks to document current practice, available frameworks and lessons learned around conflict sensitivity.







*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

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