

SMC's policy for conflict sensitivity

Summary

This policy has been adopted by the board of SMC on Dec 5, 2019 and is valid until further notice¹.

The policy describes SMC's view on conflict sensitivity and is based on the following definition of conflict:

Conflict is a social situation where two or more actors pursue goals that at least one of the actors perceives as different or incompatible.² Conflicts are a natural part of every society. They can be positive and contribute to the development of society as long as they are managed constructively. A conflict becomes destructive when one or more of the actors try to achieve their goals by using violence or threats of violence.

Conflict sensitivity is the understanding that a development intervention always affects peace and conflict dynamics in the context in which the intervention takes place. This applies equally to humanitarian responses, long-term development, and peacebuilding. A conflict-sensitive approach strives to:

- avoid potential negative effects of interventions, such as contributing to a conflict developing in a destructive direction, or the development of new conflicts, and
- strengthen local capacity for peace, both for prevention of conflict and for peacebuilding purposes, as far as possible within the mandate and purpose of the operation.

Conflict sensitivity requires that we, regularly, through the entire cycle of the intervention:

- analyse social tensions and conflicts in the context,
- analyse how our intervention affects social tensions and conflicts in the context, a so-called conflict impact assessment, and
- adjust the intervention based on these analyses.

¹ The policy has been developed by SMC's office in collaboration with a reference group from the member organisations. The policy is followed up and evaluated by SMC's management team.

² See P. Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution. War, Peace and the Global System*, p. 16.

Working in conflict areas requires good risk awareness; therefore, risk analysis should include how social tensions and conflicts affect the intervention.

How to operationalise conflict sensitivity at the level of the intervention and the organisation is described in section 4 and in the assessment criteria for each grant.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to describe SMC's view on conflict sensitivity. Through the policy, SMC aims to ensure that our organisation, our member organisations and their partner organisations apply a conflict-sensitive approach, working proactively and systematically to prevent and mitigate destructive conflicts.³ The policy guides SMC's assessments of development and humanitarian interventions. It aims to provide support to SMC's member organisations and their partner organisations in analysing conflicts, including the consequences and risks of conflicts at all stages of the intervention. The policy also guides SMC's operational work, for example with capacity building efforts and advocacy.

2. SMC's view on conflict and conflict sensitivity

2.1 Conflict sensitivity and development

Armed conflicts represent the most serious obstacle to the development of many countries today. Armed conflicts increase the risk of human rights and international humanitarian law being violated and people being forcibly displaced. Extreme poverty and starvation are increasingly concentrated in fragile and conflict-affected states. Approximately 1.8 billion people are estimated to live in these fragile and conflict-affected states. If no action is taken, the OECD-DAC estimates that 80 percent of the world's poorest people will be living in fragile areas by the year 2030.⁴ Conflict prevention and peacebuilding are, therefore, fundamental to human rights and poverty reduction efforts.

Many of the interventions supported by SMC through member organisations and partner organisations are implemented in conflict and post-conflict areas. Therefore, we need a conflict-sensitive approach and a good understanding of the driving forces for both peace and conflict. A conflict-sensitive approach is applicable regardless of whether we are operating in conflict and post-conflict areas or in areas that are not or have not been directly affected by armed conflict.

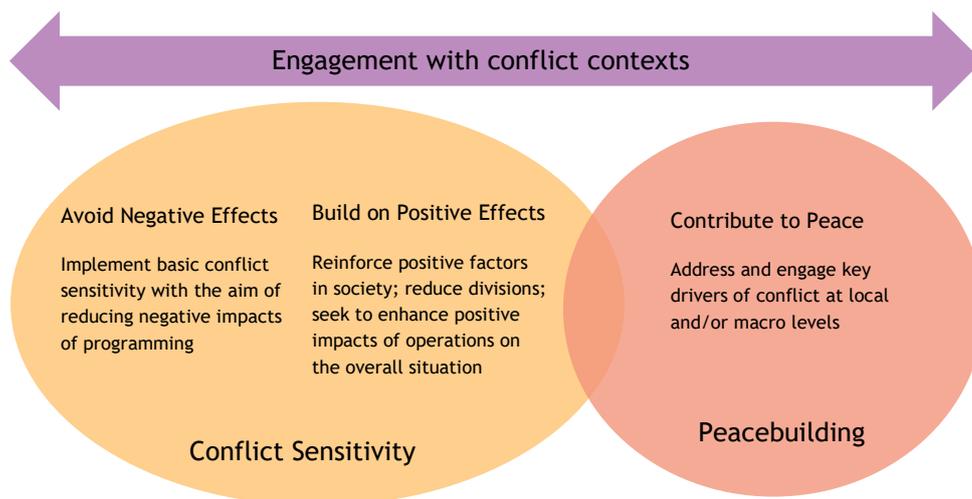
³ See SMC's other policies for our further in-depth perspective on conflict sensitivity in relation to, for example, gender equality and anti-corruption.

⁴ See "highlights" in the *States of Fragility 2018*, OECD.

A conflict-sensitive approach is also crucial to realising the principle from the Sustainable Development Goals *to leave no one behind*, because conflict sensitivity builds on looking at both individual needs and the needs of different groups affected by an intervention.

Climate change is contributing to increasingly protracted humanitarian crises. The fact that the crises are also affected by long term and complex armed conflicts, highlights a growing need to link humanitarian responses, development cooperation and peacebuilding⁵. Extreme and dramatic events reveal a society's internal vulnerability and exposure to risk. It is therefore important to actively work with and understand the linkages between climate change, conflict and resilience within the framework of a conflictsensitive working method.⁶

The graph below describes how conflict sensitivity relates to peacebuilding during conflict. The graph comes from CDA, which is the leading organisation in conflict sensitivity⁷. Note the difference between working with a conflict-sensitive approach in all types of interventions in conflicts and interventions focused on peacebuilding.



2.2 From a Christian theological perspective

For SMC, the Christian faith is a driving force for development and we, as an organisation and as individuals, can participate in God's mission for a just, sustainable and reconciled world.⁸ Our holistic view of mission means sharing

⁵ This interaction is described as a "triple nexus" and is driven by the UN and the World Bank, among others, in *The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Initiative (2017)*. Read also the current discussion from Oxfam: *The Humanitarian-Development Nexus: What does it mean for multi-mandated organisations?*

⁶ See, for example, the UN's Resolution 2349 on the conflict in the Chad Sea region.

⁷ Over 20 years ago, Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA) initiated the principle of Do No Harm. The graph is based on a picture on page 27 of a manual for a workshop in Do No Harm. (2016), <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/publication/no-harm-workshop-trainers-manual-2016/>.

⁸ *Tillsammans för förändring (Together for change)*, SMC's strategic plan 2017-2021.

faith in word and deed and working for a just, peaceful and sustainable world where human rights are respected.⁹

Our theological starting point is God's love for everything created. As God's image, every human being has an equal and inviolable value but also the ability, opportunity and responsibility to be God's co-creator and co-steward of creation and of human relationships. Humanity turning away from God and from one another have led to violent conflicts and great devastation for people, animals and nature.

From both a Christian theological perspective and a rights perspective, conflict is a necessary part of social development as the struggle for justice, peace and universal human rights challenges the power and privileges of individuals or groups. The Christian message also carries with it an experience of restoration, reconciliation and constructive conflict transformation based on Jesus' example, which goes beyond the rights perspective. Despite our shortcomings, God invites us to his kingdom and to work for peace and reconciliation¹⁰. This is a strong foundation for a conflict-sensitive approach in everything we do.

2.3 Conflict: a necessary social process

SMC sees conflict as a social situation which is either constructive and non-violent or destructive with threats of violence, direct violence or structural violence. A violent and destructive conflict can be transformed into a non-violent and constructive conflict through *conflict transformation*. This means that conflicts need to be resolved even after the direct violence has ceased, for example, through a ceasefire, a peace agreement or a legal process against the perpetrators of violence. The cessation of direct violence is only the beginning of a processes that hopefully can lead to justice, reconciliation, restoration and peace. Some conflicts may never fully be resolved, but it does not have to be a failure as long as the conflicts are handled constructively and non-violently.

The clearest expression of oppression and destructive conflict is violence. Violence is commonly defined in terms of *direct violence* (physical and psychological violence such as war, murder, rape, threat or harassment), *structural violence* (inequality, discrimination and exploitation built into political, economic, social and cultural systems) and *cultural violence* (religious and cultural norms and values used to justify and motivate structural and direct violence). These three types of violence are closely linked and reinforce each other.¹¹ By paying attention to these linkages, we can identify more and new ways of handling conflicts.

⁹ SMC's values (2015)

¹⁰ Council of Sweden's publication *Fred - detta vill kyrkorna i Sverige* (2010) is a good resource for both theological depth and inspiration for action.

¹¹ J Galtung, *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*, p. 167-191 and Sida's *Peace and conflict tool box*.

2.4 Interventions and conflict—mutual influence

All actors working with long-term development interventions, humanitarian interventions and peacebuilding interventions want to influence their context in some way. The challenge is that they affect the context in more ways than they intend. If the implementing actor does not work in a conflict-sensitive manner, there is a risk of contributing to the emergence of new conflicts, the destruction of social mechanisms that sustain conflict transformation at the local level or the aggravation of already destructive conflicts. To avoid this, organisations and interventions should instead contribute to the weakening of *dividing* factors that increase mistrust, suspicion and inequality and that divide and create tension between people and groups.

Interventions should also seek to strengthen *connecting* factors that increase trust and equality and bring people and groups together. It is seldom the case that an intervention as a whole has a one-sided effect on either connecting or dividing factors. Therefore, an important part of a conflict-sensitive approach is to conduct a thorough analysis of actors and understand how the implementing organisation relates to and influences various factors in the context. In addition, organisations need to analyse themselves as an actor and act on the challenges and risks highlighted by the analysis.¹²

An intervention can affect a conflict by, for example:

- what the organisation does, such as goals of the intervention, transfer of resources, location and timing of the intervention, activities, collaborations with other actors and who is included or excluded in groups of participants
- how the organisation does it, such as security, procurement, recruitment, decision-making processes
- choice of local partner organisations and how rights bearers are included, which affects, for example, the relationships between connecting and dividing factors
- what resources the intervention transfers, such as money, knowledge, wells, food and advocating skills, and to whom
- attitudes and behaviour of staff who carry out the intervention, which sends signals about the values and intentions of the organisation and the intervention

A conflict-sensitive approach during the entire intervention cycle enables a conscious, proactive and systematic approach that reduces the risk of contributing to increased tensions and destructive conflicts. At the same time, it

¹² This is also addressed in SMC's policy on religious literacy, where we write that contextual and practical religious literacy can strengthen organisations' capacity for conflict sensitivity.

strengthens the opportunity to positively influence them. Even in peacebuilding, a conflict-sensitive approach is foundational to being able to contribute to conflict transformation and avoiding unexpected negative effects of the intervention.

Actors and interventions are also affected by the social tensions and conflicts that exist in the context. Therefore, risk analysis needs to include how social tensions and conflicts affect the intervention; it should also include a conscious, proactive and systematic risk management.¹³

Investments in humanitarian work, long-term development cooperation and peacebuilding sometimes have different types of risks to relate to and manage, due to different objectives and working methods. The goal of humanitarian work is to save lives in the short term, relieve distress and establish dignity for people in disaster situations. The work is based on the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), where the actor's impartiality is valued very highly. In relation to conflict sensitivity, this means, among other things, that humanitarian actors need to be aware of the risk that humanitarian aid can be used for political or religious purposes. Long-term development efforts and peacebuilding efforts aim to strengthen the capacity of civil society to be able to mobilise themselves, influence their situation and demand responsibility from duty bearers. A conflict-sensitive way of working, then, is to be aware of how the organisation's role as an influencer can both counteract but also contribute to direct, structural and cultural violence, and design the intervention based on these risks and challenges.

2.5 Gender and conflict sensitivity

In order to better nuance seemingly black and white images of reality and at the same time identify particularly vulnerable groups in society, it is important to include an intersectional gender analysis in work on conflict sensitivity. Such an analysis assumes that identity markers such as gender, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, disability, health status, ethnicity and religious affiliation affect how we are influenced by and experience conflict, peace and security in everyday life. Generally speaking, women and girls often carry other experiences with them compared to the experiences of men and boys in terms of conflict, peace and security. For example, men often have greater social pressure than women to participate in military groups and other forms of violence. Another example is that in many cases, women, girls and LGBT people are more at risk of being exposed to sexual violence or experiencing insecurity or threats of violence than heterosexual men. These general examples can be further nuanced in local contexts by including more of the identity markers listed above.

SMC takes the perspective that lived experience should be seen as knowledge. Throughout history, this knowledge has been silenced or ignored both in the political space and in the social and private spheres. It is therefore important to

¹³ See SMC's policy on risk management (2017).

acknowledge and use lived experience of particularly vulnerable groups of women, men, girls or boys as a knowledge base in the work on conflict sensitivity. With this perspective more types of violence, such as sexual violence, domestic violence or cultural violence, can be recognised as security threats and thus become a higher political priority. One way for SMC to contribute to effective, relevant and conflict-sensitive interventions that acknowledge lived experience as knowledge is to ensure the participation and influence of women and vulnerable groups in the interventions we support.¹⁴ In this way, we can contribute to avoiding unintended effects that can lead to developing destructive conflict for the public or for particularly vulnerable groups, and instead help to strengthen local capacity for prevention and peacebuilding purposes.

3. SMC’s theory of change and conflict sensitivity

SMC's theory of change is based on the notion that *society*, *organisation* and *individual* are three spheres that influence each other. Civil society organisations are the primary change agents with their ability to mobilise and strengthen rights holders at the individual level so that they can organise themselves to collectively demand rights and responsibility from duty bearers at state and societal level.



3.1 State/society

In a functioning democracy where the rule of law is upheld; it is the state as an actor who has the monopoly on the use of violence within its territory; the security sector is under civil and democratic control; law enforcement institutions function, and everyone is treated equally before the law and have access to the public institutions. In practice, the use of violence in a democratic rule of law system is usually expressed through other forms of coercion rather than through direct physical violence; such as e.g. imposing imprisonments and determining legal ownership in disputes. It is also the responsibility of the state to protect its citizens and others living within the state's territory and to provide conditions for

¹⁴ Read more about women's participation in peace and security in UN's Resolution 1325.

both individuals and organisations to fully participate in society, in respect of human rights.

Since reality is much more complex and actors at state and societal level in many cases do not live up to their obligations, a conflict-sensitive approach is needed to identify and analyse how these actors affect social tensions and conflicts and how different types of development interventions affect these tensions and conflicts at the state and societal levels.

Violent conflicts at the societal level may involve armed state actors, armed non-state actors, and international actors. Different parties will always have partly different perspectives and explanatory models for why a conflict arises and what drives it. It is likely that the more destructive a conflict becomes, the more different perspectives and root causes the parties will reproduce. Post-conflict situations are often fragile and characterised by rule of law deficiencies a lack of access to justice, as well as maintained or increased levels of violence. In order to prevent an escalation or return to violence, and to achieve sustainable peace, it is important that all forms of interventions carried out in violent conflict and post-conflict contexts address the root causes of destructive conflict.¹⁵ A conflict-sensitive approach contributes to this.

3.2 Organisation

Organising the local community is important for reducing risks and building resilience in both development interventions and peacebuilding interventions. In order for such organisation to take place in a conflict sensitive way, it is important to work with an inclusive approach. It can be about strengthening the respect for freedom of religion and belief in order to secure non-discrimination in relation to vulnerable groups.¹⁶ It can also be about strengthening the rights of girls and women and children and young people and enabling them to participate as positive change agents in interventions, community development and conflict transformation.¹⁷

Civil society organisations active in development cooperation and humanitarian work need to ensure that the work is conflict sensitive. They also need to use a conflict sensitive approach in handling conflicts within the organisation. In addition, they have a good opportunity to identify unused resources, for example in various networks, which can contribute to conflict prevention, conflict transformation and peacebuilding. In a conflict-sensitive approach, we need to be aware that there are organisations closely associated with regimes and infiltrators that undermine civil society's work by creating fragmentation, fear and self-censorship. Therefore, it is important to support preventive activities that

¹⁵ See Sida's *Peace and Conflict Tool Box, Defining key concepts, tools and operational responses* (2017).

¹⁶ See *Wilton Park Statement on assisting religious minorities in humanitarian crisis*.

¹⁷ Further, see UN's resolution 2250 about youth, peace and security which highlights five focus areas: participation, protection, prevention, partnership, and reintegration.

strengthen the resilience of civil society in difficult contexts, such as networking, coalition building with others and the inclusion of groups without formal democratic influence.

SMC believes that religious literacy is an important part of a conflict sensitive approach.¹⁸ Faith-based organisations can contribute to conflict management and a conflict-sensitive approach in religious contexts and in communities that are strongly influenced by religious values. Religious leaders, as well as other moral duty bearers, have great power and legitimacy in many of the communities where development cooperation and humanitarian interventions are carried out. Therefore, it is important to analyse what relationship the religious leaders have to social tensions and conflicts in the context and how they can be influenced and involved.

3.3 The individual

Working with conflict sensitivity at the individual level is about strengthening vulnerable people's capacity for increased influence and opportunities to positively influence their society and take long-term responsibility for conflict transformation. It is therefore important to remember that conflicts can affect individuals differently depending on their gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, religion and economic and social status.

Working with conflict sensitivity at the individual level is also about being aware of how the behaviour of individuals affect both the local context and the intervention. A rights perspective, with individuals as empowered actors of change, is important so that an intervention does not unintentionally reinforce tensions, direct or structural violence.

An important part of a conflict-sensitive approach is therefore to look at the details of the intervention: Which individuals and groups benefit from the intervention and what perceptions do others have about those who benefit from the intervention? This includes reviewing the recruitment policy and who we hire; who the target groups are; which actors we collaborate with; which authorities we have dialogue with or cooperate with and who is not included in any of these categories. Another detail that is important to look at is the attitudes and behaviours expressed by the intervention's staff. Do the intervention staff convey that they stand for transparency, respect, non-discrimination, justice and accountability to the local community? This sends important signals to the local community about the values and intentions of the intervention and the organisation.

¹⁸ See SMC's policy for religious literacy and our religious tool (under development in December 2019)

4. Application and operationalisation

This policy is largely applied in SMC's task to, as a back-donor, channel funds to humanitarian and long-term development interventions. As part of the policy application, interventions need to fulfil the specific requirements for each respective type of grant mechanism.

In contexts characterised by armed conflict, post-conflict or limited democratic space, a conflict-sensitive approach may mean that documentation, analysis and communication need to be carried out in ways that take risk and security management requirements into account.

4.1. Assessment of interventions

SMC assesses the conflict sensitivity of individual interventions. At the same time, we encourage member organisations and their partner organisations - with support from SMC or external actors - to expand their capacity for conflict sensitivity so that it becomes an institutionalised and integrated perspective throughout their organisation (see section 4.2).

SMC's member organisations and partner organisations should systematically integrate a conflict-sensitive approach into all development and humanitarian interventions supported through SMC's channelling of funds.

The conflict analysis should be participant-based and account for:

- social tensions and conflicts existing in the context, indicating which actors and groups have a risk of destructive conflict between them;
- divisive factors that reinforce lines between conflicting groups and contribute to conflict in a destructive direction;
- unifying factors creating cohesion and trust, and contribute to constructive conflict transformation and peace in the context, which the effort can realistically influence

The next step is to make a conflict impact assessment based on the conflict analysis to assess how the intervention can affect the conflict. It should include an analysis of:

- how the intervention affects social tensions and conflicts in the context;
- how the intervention affects unifying factors and divisive factors

Based on the conflict analysis, a risk analysis should also be done, with relevant risk management.

In addition, there should be an account of the adjustments made to the intervention based on these analyses.

In order to apply a conflict sensitive approach systematically, the approach needs to be used throughout the entire intervention cycle, i.e. in planning, implementation, follow-up, evaluation and learning.

SMC has no requirements on what tools and methods to use, but the SMC's learning center provides advice about a number of tools that the SMC can recommend.

In the application, the conflict impact assessment should be clearly presented, while the conflict analysis and risk analysis can be integrated with other analyses requested by SMC. Several factors, including how affected the context is, the organisation's mandate, and the objectives of the intervention should determine the depth of the analyses. See SMC's guidelines and templates for further specific guidance.

In order to identify conflicts at different levels and develop strategies to strengthen constructive conflict transformation and peacebuilding; SMC encourages member organisations and their partner organisations to, as a complement to intervention based conflict analysis, conduct more general conflict analyses at the regional and/or national level as part of their strategic planning

4.2 Organisational assessments

SMC's member organisations and partner organisations work with conflict sensitivity in different ways and with diverse conditions. However, the application of a conflict-sensitive approach at the organisational level will always be an important criteria in SMC's assessment.

In regular dialogue with organisations and in organisational assessments conducted by SMC, SMC assess their member organisations' capacity to work with and integrate conflict-sensitive approaches in their work. The following are some of the issues which are reviewed:

- the presence of policies, tools and guidelines for conflict sensitivity and the application of these
- the competence of the personnel and the working methods used in regards to conflict sensitivity
- methods for monitoring and evaluation
- SMC also takes note of the organisation's capacity, willingness and ability to develop approaches for conflict sensitivity in the long-term and to be challenged and changed in this direction.¹⁹

¹⁹ See SMC's organisational assessment system (being developed in December, 2019).