

LASER PULSE

LITERATURE REVIEW ON CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IN PEACEBUILDING

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SUPPLEMENT TO AGREEMENT NO. AID 7200AAI8CA00009

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January 2024

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was produced for the LASER PULSE Project, managed by Purdue University. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.





Authors

This publication was produced by the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) under a sub-award funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Long-term Assistance and Services for Research (LASER) Partners for University-led Solutions Engine (PULSE) - Co-operative agreement AID-7200AA18CA00009. It was prepared by Jessica Baumgardner-Zuzik (AfP), Principal Investigator (PI); Shaziya DeYoung (AfP), Lead Researcher; Allyson Bachtta (AfP), Researcher; and Jeannie Shroads (AfP Consultant), under the LASER PULSE program. This report was designed by Nicholas Gugerty (AfP), Senior Associate for Communications.

Suggested Citation

Baumgardner-Zuzik, Jessica, Shaziya DeYoung, Allyson Bachtta, and Jeannie Shroads. 2023. Literature Review on Conflict Sensitivity in Peacebuilding. West Lafayette, IN: Long-term Assistance and Services for Research – Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine (LASER Pulse Consortium).

About LASER PULSE

LASER (Long-term Assistance and Services for Research) PULSE (Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine) is a 10-year, \$70M program funded by USAID's Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub that delivers research-driven solutions to field-sourced development challenges in USAID partner countries.

A consortium led by Purdue University, with core partners Catholic Relief Services, Indiana University, Makerere University, and the University of Notre Dame, implements the LASER PULSE program through a growing network of 3,700+ researchers and development practitioners in 86 countries.

LASER PULSE collaborates with USAID missions, bureaus, and independent offices, and other local stakeholders to identify research needs for critical development challenges, and funds and strengthens the capacity of researcher-practitioner teams to co-design solutions that translate into policy and practice.

Disclaimer

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ACRONYMS

AfP	Alliance for Peacebuilding
AIR	American Institutes for Research
CS	Conflict Sensitivity
CSIWG	Conflict Sensitivity Integration Working Group
CSRF	Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility
CVP LAIT	Conflict and Violence Prevention Learning Agenda Implementation Team
DNH	Do No Harm
HDP	Humanitarian, Development, and Peacebuilding
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IP	Implementing Partner
LAQ	Learning Agenda Question
LASER PULSE	Long-term Assistance and Services for Research Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine
LR	Literature Review
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCIA	Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment
PICO Criteria	Population, Intervention, Control, and Outcomes
ToC/s	Theory/ies of Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Conflict and Violence Prevention Learning Agenda Implementation Team (CVP LAIT) was tasked with co-creating and implementing a bureau-wide learning agenda that:

- Establishes the evidence base for effective approaches to armed conflict and violence prevention;
- Identifies opportunities for CVP investments that would produce new knowledge to fill gaps in the existing literature;
- Provides USAID staff with events, tools, resources, and/or guidance to incorporate learning agenda findings into their work; and
- Conducts original research into armed conflict and violence prevention.

Through an intensive, multi-stakeholder consultation process with USAID Washington and mission staff, conflict sensitivity (CS) in peacebuilding was identified as an effort that, if backed by sound evidence and guidance, could benefit program design, outcomes, policy, and knowledge generation.

To determine the best practices of CS as applied to peacebuilding practice, AfP conducted a wide-ranging evidence review of theoretical and evidence-informed academic research articles and other resources, including program plans and evaluations, guidebooks, policy statements, training materials, case studies, and toolkits.

Although there is a significant lack of evidence-based research examining the practice and effectiveness of CS, AfP's review revealed how some organizations across the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding (HDP) sectors are currently implementing CS into their work, with a primary focus on the peacebuilding sector. The findings include successful strategies and lessons learned, challenges that limit effective practice, and exemplars of CS practice. While CS policy appears to be more developed within humanitarian and development sectors, the minimum standards and best practice points identified in this review are applicable to peacebuilding practice with some additional, specific recommendations. Notably, peacebuilding organizations must first resist the assumption that all peacebuilding interventions are *de facto* conflict sensitive.

While much progress has been made and CS practitioners have access to many resources, the implementation of CS unfortunately remains uneven across all sectors, in part, because of the decentralized nature of defining its minimum standards and best practices across organizations, policies, and programs. Consistent implementation of a commonly accepted set of minimum standards and best practices could greatly strengthen CS implementation by providing the foundation for effective evaluation and research. The review presents additional recommendations to explicitly address these challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The concept and practice of CS arises from the understanding that all interventions within fragile and conflict-affected environments will interact with and affect the local context and vice versa, whether they be a humanitarian, development, or peacebuilding intervention. These interactions may be unforeseen and unintentionally exacerbate existing tensions or deepen social divisions, thus causing unnecessary harm in or to the community. By seeking to understand the context and these interactions before and during interventions, CS practice aims to minimize negative effects and maximize the opportunity for positive effects. Practitioners must appreciate that conflict is a “day-to-day, lived experience inseparable from the particular challenges communities and populations face,” and that as an actor operating in fragile and conflict-affected settings, they are acting within those parameters as an “influencing factor” (Bayne and Raunkiaer-Jenson 2022, 6). Even peacebuilding interventions seeking to reduce violence and increase peace have the ability to cause harm if not designed and carried out in a conflict sensitive manner (Chigas and Woodrow 2018). Peacebuilders must not and cannot assume that their interventions are conflict sensitive simply because they are conducting peacebuilding work.

In theory, CS practice is an approach to ensure that peacebuilders’ influence is positive, will contribute to improving the effectiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability of interventions by equipping actors with a deeper understanding of the context, and will not adversely impact or exacerbate conflict dynamics (DCA FABO 2021; Inter-Agency Standing Committee Results Group 4 2022; UN Sustainable Development Group 2022). In practice, however, this theory has not yet been thoroughly tested or proven and CS practice remains uneven across interventions (Chigas and Woodrow 2018; Inter-Agency Standing Committee Results Group 4 2022; Midgley et al. 2022).

Despite the wealth of practice materials and policy statements, significant gaps between theory, policy, and practice remain (Ernstorfer et al. 2022; Inter-Agency Standing Committee Results Group 4 2022). These gaps center around three related and reinforcing themes: (1) inconsistent adoption at the organizational level and implementation in the field; (2) a lack of research on CS process and effectiveness; and (3) a failure to evaluate CS practice based on field-approved, validated, and required minimum practice standards. While practitioners and policymakers “understand the general principles in theory, insufficient knowledge of how to implement them in practice in programming and operations” is a limitation to development of the field (Ernstorfer 2019, 4). A lack of evaluation studies based on common minimum practice standards results in a weak evidence base for research. Thus, the state of CS practice is immature and requires additional research and evaluation support to become a consistently implemented pillar of peacebuilding practice.

This report presents findings from a literature review (LR) of the best practices for CS as applied to peacebuilding.

The goal of this LR is to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the elements of CS practice in the peacebuilding sector, including, for example, definitions, tactics, training, organizational governance, and accountability?
2. Which of these elements have coalesced into a set of CS best practices in peacebuilding?
3. Which elements of CS are best practices supported by research, emerging trends that invite future research, or challenges and evidence gaps that require additional attention?

Methods

This research involved an LR of relevant academic research, programmatic materials, and practice materials focused on CS in the peacebuilding field. While the research focused specifically on peacebuilding practices, many resources from development and humanitarian organizations and activities have been included in the analysis to inform and develop the elements of CS practice for peacebuilding.

The research applied the following methodology: (1) resource identification and collection; (2) eligibility determination of collected resources; (3) materials, sector, and framework analysis; and (4) synthesis of findings.

Resource Identification and Collection

To develop a comprehensive corpus of relevant resources, AfP leveraged well-known CS knowledge hubs, prior experience in CS research, and its own membership network and communities of practice to identify a multi-track data collection process with three distinct sources for resource identification and collection:

1. Open call for evidence from members in the AfP Conflict Sensitivity/Integration Working Group (CSIWG).
2. Internet hand searches of online databases, journals, and organizational websites including, but not limited to, the [USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse \(USAID DEC\)](#), [ReliefWeb](#), [JSTOR](#), and [EBSCOhost](#). Structured searches were performed using primary terms, secondary terms, and logical operators. Primary: “Conflict sensitivity/sensitive peacebuilding,” “conflict sensitivity/sensitive best practice,” “conflict sensitivity/sensitive principles/standards,” “context sensitivity peacebuilding,” “do no harm/DNH peacebuilding,” “do no harm/DNH best practice,” and “peace and conflict impact assessment.” Secondary: “best practice,” “principles,” “standards,” “trends,” and “evaluation.” Logical operators: “and/or.”
3. Additional resources through snowballing: using the references and bibliographies of collected resources, relevant resources that were omitted from the initial search were identified and scraped for inclusion.

AfP used Microsoft Excel to track references and code key characteristics documented for each resource. This method allowed researchers to quickly access information in one place, check each other’s work to avoid duplication, and efficiently evaluate characteristics of each resource against the inclusion criteria when deciding whether to include for full text coding and review.

Eligibility Criteria

AfP defined the parameters of this study using a population, intervention, control, and outcomes (PICO) criteria, which is the standard used in [Cochrane](#) and [Campbell Collaborative](#) systematic reviews. Although this research is an LR, AfP adhered to best practices aligned with systematic evidence reviews where feasible. AfP constructed search queries, identified and collected resources, and assessed resource eligibility for this LR based on the criteria highlighted on the following page.

Table 1: PICO criteria and inclusion/exclusion criteria

Criteria	PICO Criteria Particulars	Eligibility
Population/Problem	Application of CS practices in the peacebuilding sector	All materials focusing on CS practice including, but not limited to, guides, toolkits, training materials, academic research papers, critiques, evaluations, systematic reviews, and program reports.
Intervention	No restrictions	Not applicable
Control/Comparison	No restrictions	Not applicable
Outcome	No restrictions	Not applicable
Geographic Context	No restrictions	Not applicable
Language	English	Not applicable
Year	January 1, 2016 - August 1, 2023	Searches were limited to post-2016 resources to provide a focus on contemporary CS practice and to update the USAID Conflict Sensitivity Integration Review published in 2016. Additional resources pre-2016 could be eligible based on relevance to the research at the researcher's discretion.
Publication	Academic, government, private, and scholarly literature	Not applicable

Materials, Sector, and Framework Analysis and Synthesis of Findings

Once the included resources were finalized, a thematic analysis approach was applied, assigning each resource to a material type, a sector, and a CS framework. A researcher conducted thematic analysis using a traditional card-sort theme extraction method¹ across the three characteristics. Through this process, thematic categories relating to each characteristic were created inductively through a method of open coding. Once thematic categories were developed, the data was coded within relevant thematic categories for final analysis. Thematic categories were validated by a second researcher. These analyses assisted in better understanding the landscape of resources and diversity in CS practice from which best practices could be extracted.

After the resources were coded by material type, sector, and framework, the researcher conducted full text-coding of an additional four variables relevant to the Learning Agenda Question (LAQ): CS definitional boundaries, practice elements, challenges, and results or findings from the resource. This method of open coding revealed common themes and highlighted example resources relevant to the research questions and LAQ. The researcher and Principal Investigator (PI) then reviewed all full-text resources to extract practice elements, best practice points, and key recommendations to inform the research and synthesize key findings.

¹ Card-sort theme extraction is a method for inductively analyzing qualitative data for the purposes of thematic analysis. Once data is organized into specific categories, a researcher, physically or using CAQDAS, sorts the data into generally higher and higher groups to facilitate inductive reasoning. For more information, reference Miles, Matthew B., A. M. Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña. 2020. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. 4th ed. Los Angeles: Sage.

Limitations of the Research

AfP employed a multi-track data collection process, including multiple open calls for unpublished evaluations and grey literature from its membership base. However, search methods had an over reliance on the English-language, biasing the scoping to Anglophone publications. Additionally, it is possible that valuable resources may have been missed during the resource scraping process, including newer publications released after the closure of the data collection period, leading to conclusions being drawn on partial data. Despite these limitations, this research effort provides valuable resources aimed at strengthening the knowledge base to improve CS practice in the peacebuilding field.

Definitions and Boundaries

Table 2: Definitions and boundaries

Conflict Analysis	The systematic study of the profile, causes, actors, and dynamics of conflict (International Alert 2004).
Conflict Sensitivity	The ability of an organization to understand the context in which it operates; understand the interaction between its intervention and the context; and act upon the understanding of this interaction in order to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts (International Alert 2004).
Do No Harm (DNH) Analytical Framework	The practice of understanding how aid interacts with conflict in a particular context to mitigate unintended negative effects through analysis of dividers and connectors (CDA Collaborative Learning, The Do No Harm Project n.d.).
Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA)	A CS method for mapping the peace and conflict environment within which an initiative is set, identifying the impacts of conflict or peace on an initiative in a violence-prone setting, and identifying the impact of an initiative on peace or conflict in a violence-prone setting (Ware and Laoutides 2021).
Peace Responsiveness	The ability of actors operating in conflict-affected or fragile contexts to be conflict sensitive and deliberately contribute to sustaining peace through their technical programming, which integrates peacebuilding principles and processes into humanitarian and development actors' operational practice (Ernstorfer et al. 2022).
Peacebuilding	A wide range of efforts by diverse actors at the community, national, and international levels to address the immediate impacts and root causes of conflict and violence before, during, and after it occurs (AfP n.d.).
Practice Materials	Refers to guidance notes, toolkits, program plans, and program evaluations published by implementing partners (IPs), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), donors, and practitioners relating to CS practice.
Programmatic Materials	Refers to program plans or reports, evaluations of programs, and other program-specific materials.
Research Materials	Refers to academic research papers and theoretical critiques relating to CS practice.

Included Studies

A total of 197 resources were identified through initial targeted searches. Once duplicates were removed and initial screening completed, a total of 183 resources were retained for review based on criteria defined through AfP's PICO framework. Following eligibility review, in total, 126 resources were retained for full-text review and coding.

Since 2016, the number of CS resources and publications has been steadily increasing, with 2022 witnessing the pinnacle of resources published in the catalogue, reflecting 20% (N=25) of included resources. Notably, more than half of the resources, 63% (N=79), were published between 2020 and 2023, reflecting the growing interest in CS over the recent years. Of the 126 resources, 55% (N=69) were coded as practice materials, 24% (N=31) as research materials, and 21% (N=26) as programmatic materials,² reflecting a diversity in resources utilized for this research.

When looking at the geographic coverage of included resources, 44% (N=55) did not state a specific geographic focus. From the remaining 56% (N=71) that specified a geographic focus, Lebanon (7%, N=9) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (6%, N=7) emerged as primary locations, accounting for 13% of all included resources. These countries were closely followed by Nepal (4%, N=5), Nigeria (3%, N=4), and South Sudan (3%, N=4). While many practice materials, such as toolkits and training materials, did not state a specific geographic focus, a trend toward CS consortia did generate many country-specific resources. Accordingly, Lebanon and South Sudan may be overrepresented as their national CS hubs generated multiple resources.

Overall, 31% (N=39) of the included resources focused on peacebuilding objectives solely, whereas an additional 29% (N=37) focused on peacebuilding in combination with other humanitarian or development objectives. Another 33% (N=42) of resources spoke to a mix of humanitarian and/or development objectives, and 6% (N=8) fell into other sectors outside of the HDP nexus. Across the entirety of the included resources, 64% (N=79) referenced a CS framework alone. CS was also referenced in combination with DNH across 25% (N=32) of the corpus. DNH was referenced alone in 7% (N=9) of the included resources, and only a handful, 4% (N=5), of resources referenced the Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA), either alone or in combination with other CS practices.

RESULTS

The research did not identify any resources that directly evaluated the effectiveness of conflict sensitive practices or their impact on improved peacebuilding outcomes. Previous research on the CS evidence base conducted during spring 2023 found little rigorous evidence, and an open call for grey literature and unpublished evaluations to the AfP CSIWG also yielded thin results. Three included resources in the catalogue did report results from CS training and methods trials (McCants-Turner and Garred 2022; Ware 2023; Ware and Laoutides 2021); however, these reported on process findings and did not evaluate the impact of CS on programmatic outcomes.

As such, there is limited systematic research specifically targeting CS practices, leading to a fragmented and unsubstantiated evidence landscape. A range of factors could be contributing to this gap. The lack of consensus on what defines and constitutes effective CS practices leads to varied approaches that are difficult to evaluate in a uniform manner. When it is performed, measuring the impact of CS practices poses significant challenges due to the complex and ever-changing nature of conflict environments, making it difficult to isolate specific effects. The diverse contexts in which CS is applied further complicate efforts to standardize research and methodologies. Resource constraints, such as funding limitations and access issues, especially in conflict-affected areas, also hinder comprehensive research efforts. Insufficient reporting and

2 For the purposes of this research, the differentiation between practice, research, and programmatic materials is defined in the preceding section, *Definitions and Boundaries*.

documentation of CS practices by implementing organizations contribute to the gaps in data. Often, these practices are not fully integrated into broader peacebuilding programs, which limits opportunities for holistic evaluation. The rapidly changing dynamics of many conflict situations can quickly render research findings outdated, requiring adaptive research approaches that may not always be practical. Lastly, the interdisciplinary nature of CS adds another layer of complexity, as it intersects with various fields. This multifaceted nature often shifts the focus to immediate outcomes, overshadowing the long-term impacts that are harder to quantify and analyze. Addressing these challenges is crucial for strengthening the CS evidence base and enhancing the effectiveness of CS in peacebuilding and related sectors.

Despite the lack of evidence-based research evaluating the effectiveness of CS or its impact on peacebuilding outcomes, AfP reviewed significant resources to ascertain best practices and their related exemplars for applying CS in the peacebuilding sector. The research revealed CS strategies that worked, challenges that limited effective practice, and exemplars of practice that could prove useful to others. To support future research, address the gaps in literature, and advance the CS field, the following research results outline a standard definition of CS, propose a set of CS minimum practice standards, and highlight best practice points and standout resources.

CS Development and Evolution

“Conflict sensitivity emerges from the recognition that all assistance—whether humanitarian, development, peacebuilding, political, or security—cannot be separated from the conflict context in which it is delivered.”

- Conflict Sensitive Assistance in Libya Forum 2022, 5

It is useful to understand the development and evolution of CS to contextualize the current state of practice. CS originated from the concept of DNH as described in Mary Anderson’s 1999 landmark book *Do No Harm: How aid can support peace—or war*, which later evolved into the *Do No Harm Analytical Framework* (Schmeidl et al. 2023). DNH is a multipart analytical and decision-making framework centered on an analysis of “dividers” as sources of tension and “connectors” as drivers of peace (CDA Collaborative Learning Projects n.d.; European Commission 2021; United Nations Development Program n.d., 184).

By the mid-2000s, the term CS was adopted to encompass the various approaches to conflict and context analysis with the goal of DNH (Almeida and Harris 2021). Search for Common Ground described three differences between CS and DNH:

- CS seeks to maximize opportunities for peace;
- DNH considers the one-way interaction that an intervention will have on a context, while CS also considers the effect the context may have on the intervention and its goals; and
- Due to its focus on dividers and connectors, DNH may be most useful in localized inter-communal conflicts, while CS should take a broader view of peace and conflict dynamics and may be more suited to political or multi-level conflicts (Wood 2018).

Promising progress has emerged in the decades since the introduction of CS, including the development of conflict sensitive approaches and the inclusion of CS requirements in the policies of many donor countries (Tschunkert and Vogel 2022). Researchers have also identified the implicit use of CS principles in peacebuilding work, even if they did not explicitly plan or define their work as conflict sensitive (O’Brien et al. 2023).

Despite this progress, however, Mary Anderson criticizes the current state of CS in contrast to the original goals of the DNH framework. She argues that as implemented, CS is “an undemanding concept” that “calls for awareness and care, but does not specify standards for assessment” (Anderson 2022, 529). Other approaches, such as PCIA and the concept of peace responsiveness, have been put forth (Ernstorfer et al. 2022; Interpeace n.d.; Schmeidl et al. 2023). However, most approaches appear to be “variations on a theme,” and the DNH framework and the standard practices of CS are still the most frequent references in the resources (Schmeidl et al. 2023, 522). This research focuses on the practice of CS generally, rather than the DNH framework explicitly, although given the often-intertwined nature and use of these concepts, the included resources exhibit elements of CS, DNH, and other approaches. Additionally, as this research was focused on the contemporary best practices of CS in peacebuilding, the LR did not include analysis of the related humanitarian principle of “DNH,” which is distinct and separate from the DNH Analytical Framework and CS practice. Notably, some organizations intentionally use the terms interchangeably, further muddying the conceptual distinctions (DCA FABO 2021; Schmeidl et al. 2023).



Best Practice Point: *Organizations must be clear and consistent about the CS principles and tools they are employing.*

While the DNH Analytical Framework and contemporary CS practice are similar, they are not interchangeable and the processes are often combined, intentionally or otherwise, or not explicitly explained (Anderson 2022; Drew et al. 2017; Schmeidl et al. 2023). **Many resources, for example, refer to a generic humanitarian principle of “DNH” without explicit information on the actual approach, tactics, or process used to implement the principle or a CS or DNH framework.** One resource that studied aid practices in Yemen found that while many organizations had adopted a DNH philosophy or policy, only a few identified “concrete internal mechanisms and practices” for promoting and implementing DNH across their programming (Wood 2018, 56). Oxfam’s research and experience in Afghanistan may also be illustrative of the state of CS practice in the field. It found that many humanitarian staff members operating in Afghanistan had a “very diverse understanding of the meaning and importance of conflict sensitivity,” and only a portion of the interviewees could appropriately explain it (Oxfam 2021, 4).

Despite the uneven state of practice in the field, upon reviewing the included resources, this research finds that the core components of the definition of CS are relatively consistent across the organizations that have adopted CS policy and practice. International Alert’s CS definition from 2004 and the 2012 *How to Guide to Conflict Sensitivity* published by the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium have been influential in reiterating and cementing the essentials of CS practice (Drew et al. 2017; Kim 2015). Based on the review of all the collected resources, the following is a model definition of CS:

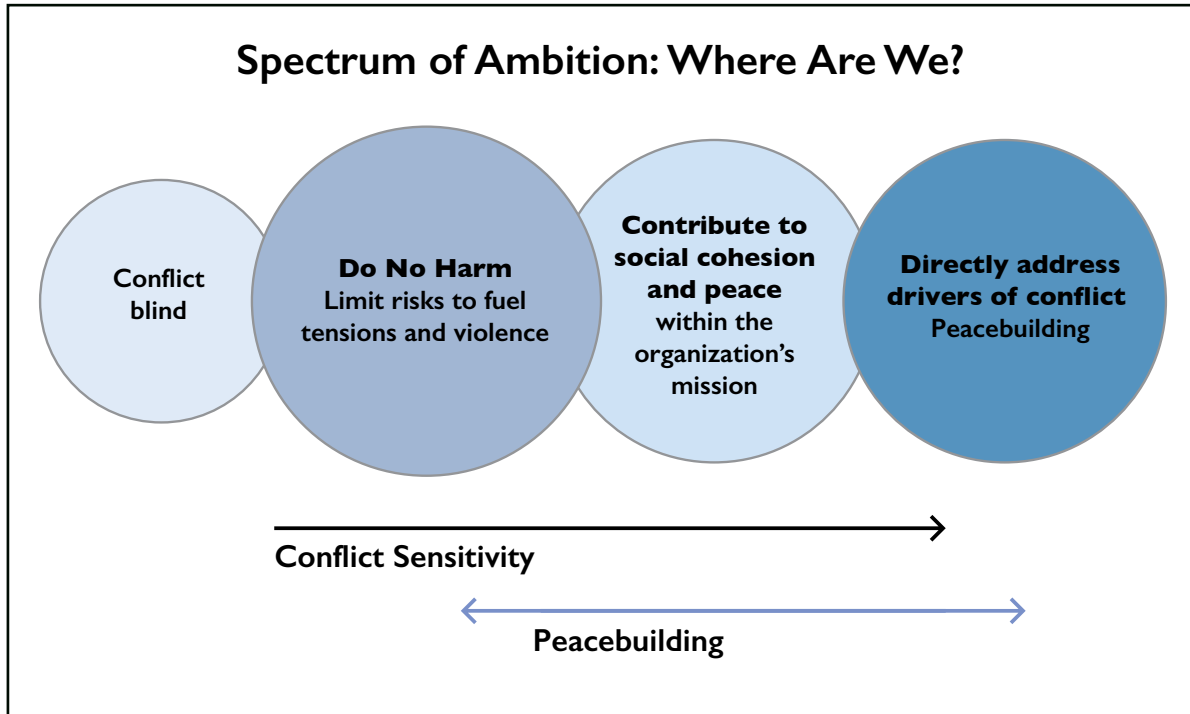
CS is the ability of an organization to:

- **Understand the context in which it operates;**
- **Understand the interaction between the interventions and the context; and**
- **Act upon the understanding of this interaction to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts.**

- Barandun 2023; Handschin et al. 2016; Hercyk 2022; International Alert 2004; Kim 2015; Oxfam 2021; Peaceful Change Initiative 2017.

A “spectrum of ambition” of CS practice is now acknowledged with many organizations and commentators noting that being “conflict blind” or “conflict ignorant” is no longer acceptable practice (Bayne and Raunkiaer-Jensen 2022; Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2020; Morris and Midgley 2019; Network for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding 2022; Tschunkert and Vogel 2022; ZOA 2020).

Figure 1: Spectrum of Ambition (PeaceNexus 2019)



Since interventions are never conflict or context neutral, organizations must at least endeavor to limit risks to beneficiaries or stakeholders. These sentiments are especially salient in peacebuilding interventions seeking to work directly on the drivers of conflict (Chigas and Woodrow 2018). **As such, CS must be considered a minimum standard in all peacebuilding interventions** (Schmeidl et al. 2023; Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2020).

Peacebuilding organizations may be delayed in fully incorporating CS practice into their work because they incorrectly assume that all peacebuilding activities are *de facto* conflict sensitive (European Commission 2021; UNDP 2017; Woodrow and Chigas 2009). However, there are important distinctions between peacebuilding practice and CS practice, and peacebuilding activities must still be carried out in a conflict sensitive way (Woodrow and Chigas 2009; UN Sustainable Development Group 2022).

CS Minimum Practice Standards

The minimum practice standards of CS appear to be well understood across sectors and actors. However, these minimum practice standards have not been standardized, applied, or tested systematically. This lack of uniformity contributes to a lack of CS evaluation, resulting in a minimal evidence base, which “hampers further momentum building” for CS practice (Interpeace 2022, 6). As such, it is crucial for donors and practitioners to adopt and validate minimum practice standards and for researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of conflict sensitive practices and their impact on peacebuilding outcomes.

Peaceful Change Initiative's *Conflict Sensitive Manual for Libya* provides a succinct summary of these common CS minimum practice standards in its Three-Step Framework (Conflict Sensitive Assistance in Libya Forum 2022). The **WHAT** clearly relates the definitional elements of CS to **HOW** CS should be operationalized:

Table 3: Peaceful Change Initiative's Three-Step Framework

	WHAT	HOW
1.	Understand the peace and conflict context by drawing on analysis.	Undertake a conflict analysis (relevant to the area you are working in), update it regularly, and monitor the conflict context.
2.	Understand the interactions between the intervention and the peace and conflict context.	Review and monitor activities for potential negative and positive CS interactions.
3.	Act on this understanding to minimize negative effects (risks) and maximize positive impacts on peace and conflict (opportunities).	Adapt or adjust interventions to mitigate and respond to risks and to leverage opportunities.

These three operational practice elements—understanding the context, understanding the interactions between context and interventions, and adapting the intervention to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts—are reflected in most organizations' view of CS, forming minimum practice standards.³



Figure 2: Adapted from *Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding Programming Guide*, UNICEF 2016



Best Practice Point: *Although these minimum CS practice standards are done in consecutive phases, they are best understood and implemented as a continuous, reflective process.*

The conflict analysis supplies the inputs for the assessment of the intervention effects. The impacts must be continuously monitored to adapt the programming or minimize effects.



Stand Out Resource

The UNDP and House of Peace [Guidance Note on Conflict Sensitivity Throughout the Project Design Cycle](#) is a comprehensive resource on implementing CS at all levels of program design—from concept development, to outreach, program design, communication of plans, and monitoring and evaluation (Garred 2022).

³ See also, Barandun and Frazer 2023; Bayne and Raunkiaer-Jensen 2022; UN Sustainable Development Group 2022.



Best Practice Point: *Implementers in rapid response, emergency crises, and active violent conflict zones **must not skip a complete CS process to attend to the immediate emergency.***

Organizations working in such situations are encouraged to adopt a “good enough” CS process that can be used to quickly assess the context and analyze the impacts of interventions. This “good enough process” could utilize a desk review of the conflict dynamics instead of a full participatory analysis and an internal brainstorming session of the possible interactions to create a rapid mapping of the context and the proposed intervention (Bayne and Raunkiaer-Jensen 2022; USAID 2023). These quick analyses should be followed up with more in-depth, inclusive analyses once the context is more stable (Bayne and Raunkiaer-Jensen 2022; Darwish 2023; World Vision International 2017).



Stand Out Resource

The [*Good Enough Context Analysis for Rapid Response*](#) resources developed by World Vision can generate a snap-shot analysis of a context using facilitated focus-group sessions and CS scenario-planning sessions that can be deployed within 10 days (World Vision International 2017).

Minimum Practice Standard I: Understand the Context Through Conflict Analysis

Conflict analysis is the cornerstone of CS practice: “conflict analysis has been an unheralded, but effective driver of conflict-sensitive aid” (McCants-Turner and Garred 2022, 20). A conflict analysis provides the basis for understanding key stakeholders, the history and drivers of conflict, and the relationships between stakeholders, vulnerable groups, power structures, and conflict (Bayne and Raunkiaer-Jenson 2022). To properly inform the CS process cycle, a conflict analysis must be conducted prior to project design and refreshed on a regular basis or any time there is a change in the local circumstances. For example, many intervention ToCs are context-specific, and thus conflict analyses must be iteratively updated to ensure the theory is still appropriate (UNDP 2023).



Best Practice Point: *CS practice and training must be sensitive to local languages, imagery, dynamics, and cultures (Nonviolent Peaceforce 2022).*

Specific terms can be perceived as jargon when not localized or contextualized. Especially when leading local training and capacity building, care must be taken to explain these concepts, since direct translations of the terminology might not appropriately convey the principles. Some researchers have found success with art and other less text-heavy materials, such as role-playing exercises, to overcome language and cultural barriers that can inhibit effective participation (Ware and Laoutides 2021; Woodrow and Jean 2019). **Even the term “conflict” can carry political or other implications.** It may be appropriate in some instances to describe the process as a “context” analysis or “context sensitivity” to avoid politically charged conversations about the term “conflict” (UN Sustainable Development Group 2022). In some cultural contexts, CS may also be misunderstood as conflict avoidance and even criticized as promoting passivity (Chan and Schmidlin 2023).

Through conflict analysis, **the drivers and supporters of peace dynamics must also be understood**—“if we find that we have overlooked local peace capacities or connectors, then we should redesign our programming not to miss this opportunity to support peace” (USAID 2020, 25). In the same vein, conflict sensitive practice must not be limited only to areas of active violence, and must be considered also in any fragile and conflict-affected areas, even those considered to be “post-conflict” or in some form of negative peace. (Drew et al. 2017). Peacebuilding programs that do not understand peace and conflict dynamics in these situations run the risk of overlooking key drivers of conflict that remain in place or could arise in the future (Risheq et al. 2023; Oxfam 2021; Vernon 2020).



Stand Out Resource

The [Programme Clinic: Designing Conflict-Sensitive Interventions](#) tool of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN includes a guided exercise to elicit a variety of conflict and peace drivers (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2019, 9-10).



Best Practice Point: *Participatory conflict analysis takes into account views from all key identity groups and is triangulated with local perspectives.*

Participatory conflict analysis is a CS best practice, especially in peacebuilding, and provides an opportunity for “interaction, dialogue, and trust-building with and between project stakeholders” (Drew et al. 2017, 25). It helps minimize latent biases and preconceived assumptions held by the donor or implementer of the intervention to create a more nuanced and locally-grounded picture of peace and conflict dynamics (Ernstorfer 2021; Robinson 2021). A development project in Myanmar employed a participatory conflict analysis process to successfully draw out the voices of marginalized, illiterate communities and elicited “complex and competing analyses of proximity and alienation” that were key to designing relevant and targeted programming (Ware and Laoutides 2021).

Minimum Practice Standard 2: Understand the Interaction Between the Intervention and the Context Throughout the Program Design Cycle

Once the conflict and context are properly understood, organizations must explore the interaction between the planned intervention and the context. Program designers must review the intervention goals alongside the completed conflict analysis to identify intersection points, risks of negative impacts on the dynamics, and opportunities for supporting positive dynamics. As with the conflict analysis, this interaction analysis must be done at the design phase and iteratively throughout implementation. “Effective conflict sensitivity requires continuous thinking about the context, and about the impact of programmes on the context...” (European Commission 2021, 4). Local dynamics may change due to external forces, or the intervention may cause unanticipated effects (either positive or negative), requiring a quick adaptation to the intervention design or other mitigation measures.



Stand Out Resource

The [UN Sustainable Development Group's Good Practice Note: Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#) includes a clear visual roadmap for engaging in this interaction analysis (UN Sustainable Development Group 2022, 24-25).

In this phase of the CS practice cycle, two questions must be answered:

1. How will peace and conflict dynamics interact with and affect the intervention?
2. How will the intervention interact with and affect the peace and conflict context?

In analyzing how the context dynamics will interact with and affect the intervention, the implementer should consider issues such as reputational risks, power dynamics, and shifting priorities on the ground. For example, an organization may find that due to local conflict conditions, the financial costs of an intervention will be high, and the sustainability of the program may be

judged to be very low. In this instance, the intervention should be carefully reconsidered, as it may not contribute to a long-term, positive, and peaceful impact. Security and access risks are also obvious interaction factors to consider at this phase, but it is important to ensure this interaction analysis is more than a risk management or security exercise. Conflict sensitive analysis is sometimes confused with simply providing “safe access” to intervenors and beneficiaries, but this level of analysis fails to consider how conflict dynamics, key actors, or gender dynamics might impact their interventions (Ernstorfer 2019; Oxfam 2021; Wood 2018). Staff must look beyond security and access reports when considering the impact of the program on the conflict (Oxfam 2021, 5). It is also necessary to consider the organization’s power dynamics and reputation to decide whether a planned intervention should be handled directly by the organization, through a local IP, or another entity entirely (UN Sustainable Development Group 2022).



Best Practice Point: *CS practice should be reflective and explicitly acknowledge the power imbalances inherent in all peacebuilding practice (Robinson 2021; Ware and Laoutides 2021).*

Islamic Relief’s CS policy commitments include: “Behaving professionally at all times and without abusing the unequal power relations that our work sometimes confers on us” (Islamic Relief n.d., 9). Organizations must reflect on their own power and positioning in any context and consider using their power to influence the practices of peers and donors and empower local actors (Robinson 2021). They must further ensure that local voices and perspectives are central in all programming and interventions to both avoid doing harm and potentially create or exacerbate conflict and its drivers. A CS organization considers the “question of who is empowered to avoid cementing patterns of exclusion or recreating the same divisions” (Peace Nexus Foundation 2019).

In considering how the intervention will interact with the context, many different categories of impacts should be considered. Some of the more prominent effects in peacebuilding interventions include:

- **Recognition/Legitimization Effect:** Working with or alongside certain local actors can give status, recognition, and perceived legitimacy to the actors or reinforce unaccountable or non-transparent processes. Conversely, working with and supporting local actors in accordance with positive principles, such as inclusion and transparency, can support strengthened political processes and therefore create more legitimate processes and institutions (Wood 2018, 26).

- **Inclusion Effect:** Creating or strengthening dialogue mechanisms that are accessible to all, irrespective of sex, age, ethnicity, religion, etc., can promote inclusion and reinforce dignity, trust, and social cohesion (UN Sustainable Development Group, 2022, 36). However, the inclusion of marginalized groups can also disrupt dominant power structures, create additional tension, and exacerbate conflict dynamics.
- **Modeling Behavior:** Stakeholders may see the way organizations and their staff behave as a model for how to act themselves. Assistance can be delivered in a way that encourages inclusive and consultative practices, and can further support the adoption of such practices by local stakeholders and organizations (Wood 2018, 28).
- **Local Capacity Effect:** The way activities are delivered may affect how state and non-state structures and institutions, organizations, and civil society function in the context (UN Sustainable Development Group 2022, 37). CS analysis should consider whether local institutions might be supported or undermined by the intervention.

Other potential effects include beneficiary selection, theft/diversion, and economic market effects (Conflict Sensitive Assistance in Libya Forum 2022; UN Sustainable Development Group 2022). While these may not always be present in peacebuilding interventions, considering the possibility of these effects is still important. Organizations should allow for open-ended, flexible, and iterative questioning alongside formal conflict analysis to consider the unique aspects of the proposed intervention and the context (Bayne and Raunkiaer-Jensen 2022).



Best Practice Point: *Peacebuilding actors should carefully consider the unique potential interaction effects of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) programming.*

If not sensitively designed, research and intervention programs can be perceived as disproportionately targeting certain communities and focusing exclusively on negative aspects of those communities or the role of religion and ideology, rather than the complex system of dynamics that a comprehensive conflict and interaction analysis would reveal (Almeida and Harris 2021; Ernstorfer 2019). A CS approach might consider framing a program with a positive ToC that seeks to enhance a community's peaceful dynamics, social cohesion, and/or resilience, rather than focusing on negative security risks.

Minimum Practice Standard 3: Adapt and Act to Minimize Negative Effects and Maximize Positive Impacts of the Intervention

CS practice is incomplete without the ability and willingness to act on the understanding of the context and its interaction and subsequently adapt programming as needed. **The program design and implementation must be agile and flexible enough to respond to changes in the context and program impacts to avoid negative effects and maximize positive impacts on peace and conflict dynamics.** As an example, members of a CS consortium in Myanmar used their shared resources to conduct CS scenario planning after the February 2021 coup (O'Brien et al. 2023). These additional resources supported the members' ability to continue their programming in a conflict sensitive way amid the changing context.

CS practice must anticipate and plan for trade-offs.

A trade-off is a situation where any course of action, including stopping a program, creates a risk of generating negative impacts (Darwish 2023; Peaceful Change Initiative 2022). CS sometimes means navigating difficult trade-offs and making decisions based on an ongoing understanding of the balance between intervention benefits and harms. When faced with a difficult trade-off, these options can almost always be surfaced through inclusive decision-making. Risks cannot be eliminated entirely, but pre-planning the process of who and how an organization would handle trade-offs may make it less likely that the intervention will be interrupted while the organization considers the question.



Best Practice Point: *Formal and informal feedback channels should be built into all programming.*

Formal and informal feedback channels provide beneficiaries, IPs, and local stakeholders an avenue to raise concerns about unintended consequences of the intervention. If unintended effects are detected early enough, a program can adapt and minimize negative impacts. However, local partners may be wary of reporting negative effects if they believe it might reflect poorly on their ability to secure further contracts (Morris and Midgley 2019). An effective CS practice must also include free and open dialogue points with partners, so they feel safe to share both successes and failures to support program adaptation.



Best Practice Point: *CS practice also extends beyond the conclusion of a program.*

Stakeholders consider the sensitivity of publicly available reports and case studies. Describing instances of theft or diversion in a case study or including maps of areas where extremist groups operate, for example, could have a chilling effect on further investment in the area, create tension with local partners, or endanger residents (See, e.g., Almeida and Harris 2021). Photos or other personally identifiable information of beneficiaries and stakeholders in reports could also be a source of harm or tension for individuals. Practitioners should reflect on any publicly shared information's true value, carefully weighing the trade-offs of sharing it, and consider options prior to publication.



Stand Out Resources

The [Conflict Sensitivity Risks, Trade-offs and Opportunities in Libya](#) resource has detailed examples of potential interactions and effects, options for mitigation or adaptation, and approaches to monitoring the interaction (Peaceful Change Initiative 2022).

House of Peace emphasizes the importance of considering options in its guidance note, [Getting Started with Conflict Sensitivity in Lebanon](#) (United Nations Development Program n.d.).



Stand Out Resource

The Swedish International Development Agency's [Integrated Conflict Perspective in Contribution Management Technical Note](#) provides its IPs with clear and predictable partner feedback processes, including regularly scheduled dialogue meetings and field visits (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency 2023).

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The state of CS practice today is mixed, but trending in a positive direction. The wide availability of CS resources, including training, practice guides, and toolkits, across many different sectors and regions is a positive development. However, the uneven implementation of CS practice, the immature state of monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) in CS, and the lack of major research development all act as a counterweight to this progress. For example, while there are no shortage of tools and guides available to conduct a conflict analysis, the practice is still underutilized and inconsistently applied (OECD 2022, Figure 2.2). Even when a conflict analysis is conducted, “proactive and systematic monitoring of the context in which an intervention is taking place is often lacking” (Oxfam 2021, 8). **Consistent implementation of these minimum standards could greatly strengthen CS practice and provide the foundation for effective evaluation and research.** However, the research revealed additional structural challenges hampering the integration and consistent implementation of CS in interventions and organizations. The recommendations below are aimed at explicitly addressing these challenges to advance CS practice more robustly and improve its overall adoption within peacebuilding programming.

I: Mainstream CS Beyond a Programmatic Tool and Into Organizational Mindset

Meaningful integration and implementation of CS into peacebuilding programming starts with successful mainstreaming of CS into organizations. “Strategy, policies, and tools matter, but working on organizational culture has been the game-changer” (ZOA 2020, 5). Even programs that may be properly designed as conflict sensitive, can “fall short within an organizational framework and institutional culture that is largely conflict insensitive” (Drew et al. 2017, 10). **Organizations must embrace CS as a mindset at the staff, leadership, and cultural levels.** That mindset must be embedded into organizational systems and processes, including human resources, finance, procurement, funding, and communications, and become a part of how the organization thinks about its own work (Conflict Sensitive Assistance in Libya Forum 2022; Oxfam 2021). UNICEF describes these considerations of applying CS to its personnel, operations and communications as “internal sensitivity” (UNICEF 2016). Examples include ensuring CS is included in strategic and tactical documents, adding CS themes into job descriptions and accountability frameworks across the organization, being aware of the positionality of staff and stakeholders, and training support personnel to make sensitive procurement and hiring decisions.

Donors also have a significant role to play in ensuring that CS practice is effectively mainstreamed by requiring and reinforcing CS minimum standards and funding CS capacity building (Oxfam 2021). The shift toward the “projectization” of aid—i.e., the “increased allocation of aid on the basis of packages of often pre-defined activities or objectives that must be carried out in a limited timeframe with a pre-defined budget”—affects the ability of IPs to fully mainstream CS practice into their own operations (Morris and Midgley 2019, 7). These partners are already tasked with many operational and compliance objectives in this



Stand Out Resources

Mercy Corps’ [Building Conflict Sensitive Interventions Toolkit](#), USAID’s [Conflict Sensitivity Capacity Assessment Tool](#) for local organizations, and the Peaceful Change Initiative’s [Conflict Sensitivity Operational Toolkit](#) all provide comprehensive materials for testing organizational commitment, policies, skills and knowledge management, integration into the programming cycle, and external donor and partner relations (Bayne and Raunkiaer-Jensen 2022; Mercy Corps 2021; USAID and fhi360 2020).

Relief organization ZOA’s [Living Conflict Sensitivity: How ZOA Changed to Better Work in Conflict](#) includes best practices, lessons learned, and case studies detailing its CS organizational assessment and transformation (ZOA 2020).

projectization shift and CS is seen as yet another box to tick without the necessary resources, including time, to support it (Ernstorfer 2019). Flexible funding models, longer-term commitment to projects and capacity building, and dedication to a partnership model were cited as key donor attributes to building CS practice (Morris and Midgley 2019; Peace Nexus Foundation 2019).

Framing CS practice as a “values-based orientation” that forms a basis for ethical peacebuilding practice could speed up mainstreaming efforts. CS practice integrates many ethical practice principles including inclusivity, representation, accountability, and a constant awareness of the broader purpose of the intervention (Almeida and Harris 2021). As such, CS can serve as an ethical and accountability decision-making framework for peacebuilding organizations and their work (Almeida and Harris 2021; Hussein et al. 2017; Schmeidl et al. 2023). CS practice should not be limited to a technical standard of how interventions are planned and executed, but should also be considered a values-based standard on how staff, partners and various stakeholders behave toward each other and their environment (Barandun and Frazer 2023). Since nearly any set of actions might result in some form of harm, CS practitioners and organizations

should focus less on the consequences of CS practice and more on the process of decision-making that CS can enable. “Conflict sensitivity ought not to mean simply an activity that has not caused harm, but rather: acting in a way that adequately considers interactions of activities with peace and conflict dynamics when decisions are made, and responding appropriately when interactions do occur” (Molesworth 2020, 4). Framing CS as the process by which an organization makes decisions about how, when, and with whom they seek to intervene with peacebuilding interventions could accelerate the shift from CS as a tools-based, box-ticking exercise to an ethically-grounded individual and organizational responsibility. By adopting a common set of minimum practice standards and clear frameworks for evaluation of CS process, organizations could establish CS as a shared, ethical value and practice norm in the peacebuilding sector.



Stand Out Resource

[*Doing No Harm and Doing More Good: Stories Of Applying Conflict Sensitivity At Helvetas*](#) is an exemplar of sharing real life successes and challenges in applying CS practice across a broad range of activities and regions (Barandun and Frazer 2023).

2: Promote Iterative Capacity Building, Shared Learning, and Program Effectiveness Training

Training has been an important part of CS mainstreaming efforts for years, and many facilities, online courses, and resource hubs exist, such as the [Conflict Sensitivity in Peacebuilding](#) course presented by United States Institute of Peace, the [Introduction to Conflict Sensitivity and Do No Harm](#) online resource hub published by DanChurchAid, and Mercy Corps’ online [Conflict Sensitivity Training Course](#). Training for staff should be a key component of organizational learning and the first step of organizational change (Drew et al. 2017; Zapf et al 2019). Many intervention plans include activities focused on CS training for partners and stakeholders as a primary entry point for interventions (See USAID 2020a; USAID 2022b). These training activities typically focus on sharing resources, tools, and materials on the elements of CS practice and its use in local contexts.

While these tools and training activities are important, follow up and continued engagement are necessary to strengthen and sustain CS practice. **A program of accompaniment and ongoing mentoring was noted in many of the resources as key to successful adoption of CS principles and organizational capacity building** (Inter-Agency Standing Committee Results Group 4 2022; Interpeace n.d.; McCants-Turner and Garred 2022; Wood 2018). Saferworld’s program of accompaniment matches a partner organization with a Saferworld CS coach. The coach provides guidance on organizational change, technical CS support, and training (Devlin 2022). The coach can also raise difficult questions about identity, power, and culture that can drive the organization toward better CS practice. This model

of accompaniment followed up with mentoring can lead to a cycle of continuous learning for all involved. The Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) noted it provided recommendations “upstream” that addressed factors at the regional or headquarters level that were constraining local CS practice (Morris and Midgley 2019).

Sharing case studies of successes and challenges with the larger CS practice community may be another effective way to advance the peacebuilding community’s understanding of CS practice. “Best practices and lessons learned based on real life scenarios are considered to be crucial learning materials” (Inter-Agency Standing Committee Results Group 4 2022).

The CSRF of South Sudan argues that CS training and learning must evolve for the continued mainstreaming and development of CS practice (Morris and Midgley 2019). Training must shift its focus beyond learning “hardware” (such as continued training on the use of technical tools) and toward learning the “software” of CS, which “builds on relationships, encourages collective reflection, and challenges power dynamics associated with the management of ‘knowledge’ within organisations” (Morris and Midgley 2019, ii). Examples of this “software” learning include engaging more directly with local partners in the field, designing handover processes, and empowering and engaging local staff in strategy reviews and policy changes (Morris and Midgley 2019).



Stand Out Resource

[Doing No Harm and Doing More Good: Stories Of Applying Conflict Sensitivity At Helvetas](#) is an exemplar of sharing real life successes and challenges in applying CS practice across a broad range of activities and regions (Barandun and Frazer 2023).

3: Support Individual and Organizational Transformation through CS Training and Reflective Practice



Stand Out Resource

[Researchers in Ethiopia](#) found that CS and reflective problem-solving training had a positive effect on grassroots empowerment (Hussein et al. 2017).

Research also supports CS training as a driver of individual and organizational transformation, not just programmatic quality (McCants-Turner and Garred 2022). Faith leaders receiving DNH training reported increased levels of sensitivity toward members of other faiths, a heightened awareness of the consequences of their actions on others, and a deepened commitment to an ethical emphasis on doing no harm (McCants-Turner and Garred 2022). This positive effect may also extend to practitioners by creating local communities of practice that enable much larger network effects of social impact (Morris and Midgley 2019, Figure 2, 13). Training aid workers in South Sudan on CS practice had a

“ripple effect” that motivated individuals to tackle sensitive topics with colleagues (Morris and Midgley 2019, i). Providing time and safe space for reflection by practitioners also contributes to the development of CS as a “reflexive awareness” that goes beyond programming and toward true organizational change (Bayne and Raunkiaer-Jensen 2022, 6; See also Hussein et al 2017). McCants-Turner and Garred (2022) noted this personalization of CS at the individual level may be key to institutional mainstreaming—and vice versa.

4: Invest in Local Collaboration and Consortium Practice

Participation in collaborative CS consortia can provide valuable benefits to CS practice in peacebuilding. CS consortia and resource facilities are operating now in South Sudan, Honduras, and Lebanon, among others. These groups publish guidance and research, consult with organizations working in their region, and provide linkages between official channels of local authorities and aid or peacebuilding organizations. Consortium members can also share conflict analyses, which helps reduce “analysis fatigue” among stakeholders subjected to multiple requests for data (Chan and Schmidlin 2023; United Nations Development Program 2017). Three examples include the [Lebanon Conflict Sensitivity](#)

[Forum](#) (LCSF), established and supported by House of Peace and international partners to assist humanitarian and development organizations operating in country through training and joint conflict analysis (Kaltenpoth and Groenewald 2021); the USAID-sponsored [Conflict Sensitivity Integration Hub for Honduras](#) that provides a dedicated help desk and website resource portal for local IPs (USAID 2022a); and the [Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility—South Sudan](#) that provides regional profiles, toolkits, and contextualized CS guidance for working in South Sudan.

Beyond providing tools and research, consortia also provide a safe space for practitioners to raise issues of concern (Peaceful Change Initiative 2017). Sometimes the unintended effects of a program may be felt in another community or sector, highlighting the benefit of collaborating with other actors in providing important data for others in the region (Drew et al. 2017). The hubs provide in-depth understanding of the day-to-day dynamics within conflict zones that could prove valuable to peacebuilders, serving as early warning systems of tension, and unintended intervention effects, as well as sources of locally-grounded solutions.

5: Develop, Test, and Fund CS MEL Frameworks

The CS practice community must develop and use effective measurement and evaluation tools to mature the field. This research found little evidence of MEL in CS practice, contributing to a weak evidence base for CS (Interpeace 2022). Only three evaluations were included in the corpus; however, none of these evaluations measured the effectiveness of the CS practice or the effect that integrating CS had on intervention outcomes (Ernstorfer 2021; USAID 2020b; USAID 2022c). In contrast, for example, CS evaluation in education programming seems more developed. The *Performance Indicator Reference Sheets for Conflict Sensitive Education Indicators* provides an extensive list of indicators for use in education programming (USAID 2019a). Every program implemented within a fragile and conflict-affected environment should include a MEL framework that assesses the effectiveness of the intervention's CS process and the impact of the

program on peace and conflict dynamics and peacebuilding outcomes. Donors also need to fund MEL and require the use of CS MEL frameworks within programs operating in these environments. Interaction analysis is an opportunity to embed measurement and evaluation indicators into the CS practice cycle. Practitioners should further share results with a consortium or sector partners to avoid repeating mistakes in future interventions with the same community, socialized best practices and lessons learned, and inform future practice.



Stand Out Resource

[Researchers describe experiences of the Durable Peace Programme \(DPP\) consortium](#), an EU-funded initiative in northeast Myanmar, which provided a few CS best practice examples. After the first round of a multi-year aid program, the group found that women and certain ethnic groups were underrepresented, resulting in negative perceptions of exclusion and favoritism. **Open communication and reflection led to a high level of trust within the group, providing the space for stakeholder feedback to be raised and acted upon.** In another example, the consortium recognized the need for a dedicated Conflict Advisor who designed and implemented an extensive CS strategy for a return and reintegration effort in partnership with two members. **The model of accompaniment and mentoring resulted in changes to the members' existing and future programming and increased local capabilities for their own CS practice.** (O'Brien et al. 2023).



Stand Out Resource

The [Conflict Sensitivity throughout the Project Design Cycle in Lebanon](#) resource describes several process, context, and interaction indicators that could be used to measure CS effectiveness (Garred 2022).

6: Invest in Rigorous Research to Make the Case for CS

Evidence of the effectiveness in CS practice is still lacking. “There is still little evidence that the tools have been consistently applied to produce tangibly improved, sustainable results” (Schmeidl, Ware, and Alberti 2023, 517). Of the 126 resources, only five reported evidence-based research outcomes, and these were limited in scope and applicability (McCants-Turner and Garred 2022; O’Brien et al. 2023; San Gabriel and Jnawali 2018; Ware 2023; Ware and Laoutides 2021). The research found no resources that explicitly measured CS practice in an intervention context or the effect CS practice had on intervention effectiveness or outcomes. Both donors and organizations need to invest time, money, and resources into further research and learning on CS. This research is needed to inform policy—both public and organizational—to ensure consistency in and broad application of CS practice across multiple sectors.

7: Integrate CS in other Cross-Cutting Issues and Frameworks

Cross-cutting issues need further development and integration into CS practice (Ernstorfer 2021; Peace Nexus Foundation 2019; Woodrow and Jean 2019). Gender analysis was found to be the most developed of these,

but even when applied, the resources reported that gender analysis and conflict analysis generally “stand next to each other” and are not integrated (Ernstorfer 2021, 17; see also Conflict Sensitive Assistance in Libya Forum 2022; Mercy Corps 2021). Little evidence was found that other marginalized groups are attended to within CS practice (Robinson 2021). More research and attention must be paid to practices and guides on how to incorporate these lenses into CS practice and vice versa. For example, House of Peace provided options for integrating cross-cutting themes, such as gender and other identities, anti-corruption and protection concerns into a CS analysis. Including themes that relate to contextual awareness and responsiveness and alternating analyses during the project cycle help to ensure depth, focus, and increased understanding (UNDP n.d., 16).



Stand Out Resource

The [Positive Youth Development in Conflict: Promising Practices in the Middle East and North Africa](#) resource applied an integrated approach to CS practice and other best practices in youth interventions (USAID 2021a).

8: Accelerate the Uptake of CS in Peacebuilding Practice

Efforts to mainstream CS into the policy and practice of peacebuilding organizations need to be strengthened. Despite significant progress, consistent use of CS best practices and full organizational adoption across the peacebuilding field has yet to be realized. **This review was not intended to determine the full extent of CS practice and adoption among other sectors; however, the resources did point to a continuing need for additional effort.** “[M]any organisations and practitioners generally embrace the principle of Do No Harm, but few implement conflict sensitivity or the Do No Harm operational framework systematically in practice” (Ernstorfer et al. 2022, 1; see also Woodrow and Jean 2019; OECD 2022; USAID ECCN Resilience Task Team 2019). By adopting a common set of CS minimum standards, recognizing areas of best practice, and sharing advanced understanding of and experience in working on conflict, the peacebuilding sector can advance the practice of CS in the sector and beyond.

“Conflict sensitivity is, fundamentally, a state of mind. It is a set of guiding principles that should lead us to critically reflect on who we are in any given context, to ask ourselves who really benefits from our presence, and to consider whether the practices we employ genuinely incentivize the kinds of change we want to see.”

CS INCLUDED STUDIES

Citation	Document Type	Location
<i>A Mapping and Analysis of Tools and Guidance on the H-P Linkages in the HDP-Nexus: An Inter-Agency Standing Committee Results Group 4 Working Paper</i> . Inter-Agency Standing Committee Results Group 4, 2022. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2022-03/Mapping_and_analysis_of_Tools_and_Guidance_Peace_RG4.pdf .	Other	Not Available
<i>A Peacebuilding Tool for a Conflict-Sensitive Approach to Development: A Pilot Initiative in Nepal</i> . Engagement in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations. Asian Development Bank, 2012. https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/29670/nepal-pbt.pdf .	Other	Not Available
<i>Advancing Solutions for Peace through Intercommunity Reconciliation and Engagement (ASPIRE): FY17 Q4 Report: July – September 2017</i> . Mercy Corps, 2017. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00N41G.pdf .	Self-Published Evaluation	Central African Republic
Akinyoade, Demola. “Doing Both Harm and Good: The Nature, Dynamics and Implications of the Niger Delta Development Commission’s (NDDC) Interventions in ODI, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.” <i>India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs</i> 73, no. 1 (2017): 53–73. https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928416683057 .	Journal Submission	Nigeria
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Brunk, Darren. “‘Whole-of-Society’ Peacebuilding: A New Approach for Forgotten Stakeholders.” <i>International Journal: Canada’s Journal of Global Policy Analysis</i> 71, no. 1 (2015): 62–87. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702015617785 .	Journal Submission	Not Available
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<i>Building Conflict Sensitive Interventions: Toolkit</i> . Mercy Corps, 2021. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/Building-Conflict-Sensitive-Interventions-Toolkit.pdf .	Other	Not Available

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<i>Conflict Integration Guide</i> . United States Agency for International Development, 2023. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA0211KZ.pdf .	Other	Not Available
<i>Conflict Sensitive Cash Assistance in Lebanon: Conflict Sensitivity Toolbox 1</i> . United Nations Development Program, 2023. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-02/CS_Toolbox1_ConflictSensitive_Cash.pdf .	Other	Lebanon
<i>Conflict Sensitive Education Performance Indicator Reference Sheets</i> . United States Agency for International Development, 2019. https://www.edu-links.org/resources/conflict-sensitive-education-indicators .	Other	Not Available
<i>Conflict Sensitive Engagement with Local Authorities in Lebanon: Conflict Sensitivity Toolbox 2</i> . United Nations Development Program, 2023. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-02/CS_Toolbox2_Engagement_with_Local_Authorities.pdf .	Other	Lebanon

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Yemen Communities Stronger Together (YCST) <i>Final Evaluation Report</i> . United States Agency for International Development, 2022. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00ZQTC.pdf .	Self-Published Evaluation	Yemen
Zapf, Martina, Nora Refaeil, and Bernardo Arevalo de Leon. “Comprehensive Capacity Development: Moving beyond Training as the Default.” <i>Journal of Peacebuilding & Development</i> 14, no. 3 (2019): 340–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/1542316619871231 .	Journal Submission	Not Available

