# EVIDENCE REVIEW ON THE INTEGRATION OF CONFLICT SENSITIVE PRACTICE WITHIN HUMAN-SERVING SECTORS

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## INTRODUCTION

USAID's Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization and Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention partnered with the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), American Institutes for Research (AIR), and Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) to co-create and implement a learning agenda that establishes the evidence base for effective approaches to armed conflict and violence prevention (CVP); identifies opportunities for CVP investments that would produce new knowledge; and provides USAID staff with events, tools, resources, and guidance to incorporate learning agenda findings into their work.

AIR was asked to conduct an evidence review to assess the evidence base for what conflict sensitivity approaches work, and in which sectors and contexts, as well as pinpoint areas that require greater investigation. When examining the research, AIR adopted USAID's definition of conflict sensitivity: *The practice of understanding how aid interacts with conflict in a particular context, to mitigate unintended negative effects, and to influence conflict positively wherever possible, through humanitarian, development and/or peacebuilding interventions* (2023). Using a robust systematic review methodology, AIR examined empirical published and unpublished research assessing conflict sensitive practice within sectors, from 2012 to 2022, finding 49 studies suitable for analysis.

## KEY FINDINGS

- There were no studies found in our review that measured conflict sensitive practices or policies as an independent variable for influencing program or activity outcomes. Similarly, there were no theories of change presented or evaluated for conflict-sensitive programming.

- The education sector is most ready to support rigorous evaluation of conflict sensitive practices. As such, USAID may want to prioritize the evaluation of conflict sensitive programming in the education sector where program replication and scale-up is more likely across context and countries.

- While the research from the workforce, health, and food security sectors is less well-developed with regard to conflict sensitivity, USAID should continue efforts to identify potential leverage points and places for developing sustainable sector-specific conflict sensitive approaches that can be tested within these sectors across diverse contexts and countries.

- The overall credibility of evidence was poor from research studies in this review, due to a lack of mixed-methods evaluation studies specifically designed to measure the impact of conflict sensitive practices. To improve research moving forward, USAID may want to provide clear expectations for conducting conflict sensitive evaluation designs that aim to explicitly measure conflict sensitive practice against development outcomes.

## SUMMARY

While there were no studies examining the impact of conflict sensitive practices on development or other outcomes, five studies mentioned conflict sensitivity in their discussion of findings – without measuring impact on outcomes. From these five studies we highlight promising conflict-sensitive strategies to test for efficacy in future evaluation.

| STRATEGY | EXEMPLAR FROM REVIEW | BENEFICIARIES |
|---|---|---|
| **Using Conflict Analysis Throughout the Project Lifecycle** | **Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment - Pakistan:** From the outset, a country-specific conflict analysis makes donor policies more sensitive to local socio-political dynamics and, if carried out on a regular basis, offers organizations the opportunity to continue to adjust their projects in response to changing circumstances. Where context analysis at the design stage was informed by the voices of those affected by a problem the results were more robust. (Ahmed, Z.S., 2015) | Entire Population |
| **Providing conflict sensitivity training, education, and tools for implementers, participants, and the wider community** | **Teacher Education Project - South Sudan:** Current Conflict Sensitive Education (CSE) guidance (as well as country-level adaptations of the minimum standards) should be complemented by future materials that provide more specific planning and prioritization tools, steps to operationalize guidelines, interim CSE guidance milestones that are adapted to country situations, and more specific risk analysis and contingency planning guidance. (Reisman, L. & Janke, C., 2015) | Students, Teachers, and Schools |
| **Developing clear policies and procedures for conflict sensitive practice** | **Community Water and Sanitation Project - Ghana:** Weak policy guidelines were discovered to have restricted the adoption of conflict management methods in these projects coupled with the myth that conflict resolution is out of the realm of development workers and planners. (Bangura, S., 2013) | Farming Districts, Farmers, Women |
| **Structuring projects to support and engage youth, women, and vulnerable populations, including in key leadership positions.** | **Northern Education Initiative - Nigeria:** Integrating themes relating to gender in a radio drama produced for community outreach activities; prioritizing gender in key positions; and ensuring learning centers are child-friendly and comply with safety standards. (DevTech, 2021) | Children, Orphans, Girls |
| **Proactively mitigating safety issues that may obstruct engagement** | **Emergency Education Support Activity - Mali:** Teachers used creative ways to mitigate the risk of violence impacting program activities, such as holding classes at night to give nearby members of extremist groups the impression that the school was closed. (TMG, 2020) | Students, Teachers, and Schools |

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