# THEIR VOICES PAPER

Issue #4

# CONFLICT SENSITIVITY:
## STORIES THAT SHAPE THE CONCEPT

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# Executive Summary

The concept of conflict sensitivity – which concerns enhancing indirect positive impacts and mitigating negative ones of any humanitarian or developmental intervention in a conflict context – has been developed by and discussed among theorists and practitioners for the past 20 years. Despite this, it has never been fully embedded in the practices of all humanitarian or development agencies.

Field experiences show that despite the abundance and availability of tools and capacity building programs, humanitarian organisations rarely take conflict sensitivity into consideration when developing or implementing their interventions in a conflict or fragile context. This leads to many unintentional negative consequences at all conflict levels of the intervention areas.

This lack of application of the conflict sensitivity principles in the field is not only a matter of practicality or technicality. The conceptualisation and framework of the concept itself have many shortcomings, including unclear scope of recommended analyses, controversial definition of positive or negative impacts, a frustrating framework for field staff, and other points. This is not at all to say that the concept is not feasible or functional. On the contrary: critically analysing the concept aims at improving its position and enhancing its application. Therefore, all conceptual shortcomings need to be addressed seriously by all theorists and practitioners.

Grassroots narratives from Lebanon and Syria tell a very recent and similar story. NGO programs that address the refugee crisis have caused numerous tensions and conflicts in their intervention areas, especially at the social level between refugees and their host communities. These negative consequences were sometimes a result of what could be perceived as "normal" mistakes or malpractices. Nevertheless, these malpractices deliver implicit ethical messages to both refugees and host communities, which hampers efforts to alleviate the conflict or mitigate its social repercussions.

Having said this, several positive examples were also heard from the field, in which tensions or conflicts were resolved or improved by the intervention of an NGO, or of an individual social activist or humanitarian worker. These examples complete the picture and prove that aid, education or advocacy programs can contribute to social peacebuilding. In addition, NGOs' experiences reveal the importance of individual and small steps that can help programs to be more conflict sensitive.

The analysis of the most common positive and negative impacts of humanitarian interventions in Lebanon and Syria highlights many opportunities for harm to be avoided and advantages that should be enhanced.

Hence, field recommendations emphasise the importance of integrating conflict sensitivity in all program development stages, investing in the capacity building of NGO staff and government officials, conducting participatory analysis and exchanging lessons learnt, and encouraging consortium-based programs.

The concept of conflict sensitivity needs to be consolidated and mainstreamed for all types of interventions, and this responsibility lies on the shoulders of those who are involved in the humanitarian and development fields.

As the title depicts both our inspiration and our aspirations, this paper aims at voicing grassroots stories and perspectives to shape and develop the concept of conflict sensitivity.

# INTRODUCTION

The concept of conflict sensitivity (CS) – though developed and extensively discussed among academics and practitioners for approximately 20 years – is far from being mainstreamed into the daily practices of humanitarian and development agencies, as suggested by criticisms and stories heard from the field[1].

Hundreds of published case studies and reviews from all over the world highlight the importance of applying conflict sensitivity approaches to conflict situations. In addition, almost all donors' policies emphasise the same principle, and most project proposals nowadays include a section that describes how the proposed project would be conflict sensitive. On top of this, many trainings and tools have been provided to help advancing and promoting the principles of CS. Nevertheless, the principle is rarely translated from theory and policy into practice[2].

Recent field experience in Lebanon and Syria tells almost the same story. 84% and 90% of House of Peace workshops' participants – in 2016 and 2017 respectively – indicated that they had no previous knowledge about the concept of CS, although they were all affiliated with active humanitarian NGOs. Not only that, but many of those who answered the question affirmatively confused CS with other concepts, such as conflict transformation[3].

This significant lack of knowledge about CS on the part of those involved in humanitarian work is a critical matter, especially in such a fragile context as Lebanon. This lack of knowledge has already been translated into unintended malpractices that negatively affect the contexts where humanitarian agencies intervene.

However, pointing out these malpractices does not mean to say that the conceptualisation of conflict sensitivity is bulletproof or beyond criticism, nor to imply that its framework is prêt-à-porter and easy to apply. On the contrary, serious work is needed to translate the core of conflict sensitivity – which is avoiding harm and enhancing good in conflict and fragile situations – into more practical and attractive approaches.

Reflecting on the concept and its application, this paper looks at the shortcomings and challenges of conflict sensitivity as observed in the field, and suggests recommendations to enhance the adoption and application of its principles.

Additionally, learning from grassroots narratives, this paper highlights common stories of how humanitarian interventions in Lebanon and Syria can cause or increase tensions at the social levels in their areas or, on the contrary, mitigate possible conflicts.

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[1] Swiss Peace 2016, Working Paper: Conflict Sensitivity: Taking it to the Next Level, page 6, available at: http://www.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Media/Publications/Working_Paper_2_2016.pdf [last accessed 09 Sep 2018]
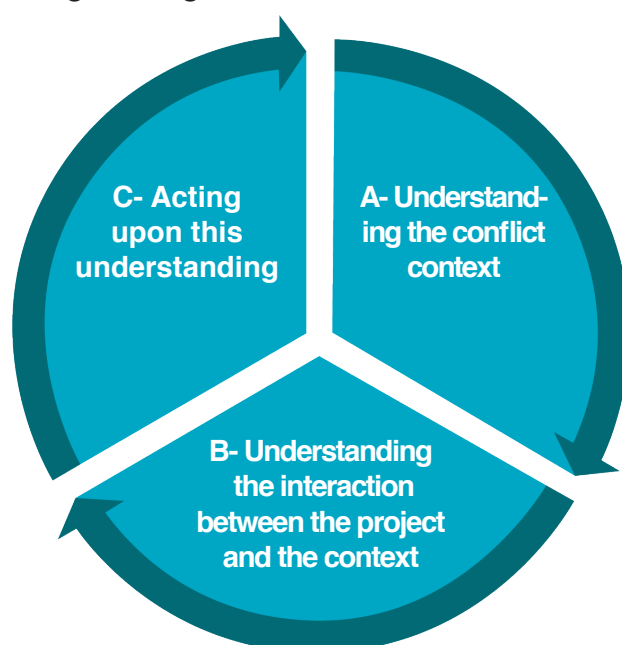
[2] Ibid

[3] House of Peace: Social Peace Workshops baseline and end-line assessment analysis.

# Section 1: Theoretical Reflection

Similar to other conflict regions, the concept of conflict sensitivity is far from being fully embedded by NGOs and humanitarian workers working on the refugee crisis in Lebanon. Does this have something to do with the concept itself, apart from how it is applied – or not applied – in the field?

This section is dedicated to looking critically at the theoretical concept and its framework, for the purpose of highlighting any shortcomings in the concept that contribute to its poor application.

In principle, the concept of conflict sensitivity is built on three pillars: 1- understanding the context and the conflict within the intervention area, 2- understanding the interaction between a certain intervention and its context, and 3- acting upon this understanding to enhance positive impacts and mitigate negative ones[4].



## A-Understanding the conflict context

In order to gain a sufficient understanding before or during any intervention, a context analysis is required. However, the scope of the recommended context analysis that helps an organisation be conflict sensitive is not clear. Should the organisation look at local dynamics only, or should they take into consideration national (and maybe regional) ones too? Should it be focusing on political dynamics during political conflicts, or should it look merely at the social repercussions? Does that depend on the scale of intervention, the size of the organisation, its budget, its mandate, or its nationality? If not, how should this be determined otherwise?

Reflecting on and answering these questions is essential before initiating a conflict sensitivity analysis, as – to put it more plainly – the scope of the analysis determines what conflict (or conflicts) will be looked at during a specific intervention, and which ones will be disregarded. This irrational choice informs the second step of the CS framework (the interaction analysis).

[4] Conflict Sensitivity Consortium 2015: Resource Pack, available at http://local.conflictsensitivity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Conflict-Sensitive-Approaches-to-Development-Humanitarian-Assistance-and-Peace-building-Resource-Pack.pdf [last accessed 10 Sep 2018]

# B-Understanding the interaction between the project and the context

From a conflict sensitivity perspective, the positive and negative anticipated impact are described as the degree to which a certain intervention exacerbates or lessens the conflict in the intervention area, intentionally or unintentionally. Therefore, it is about the impact that any project (humanitarian or developmental) has on conflict dynamics.

Most conflicts have several dimensions or facets (political, social, local, regional, etc.), and their dynamics might be completely different for each. Thus, what could be settling/lessening at the political level might be boiling at the social one. Consequently, the interaction of an NGO intervention with a certain conflict dimension might not be consistent with all other dimensions. For example, a livelihood project in a peripheral area might be doing poorly in terms of the relationships between refugees and their host communities. At the same time, however, it might have a much better impact on encouraging safe and voluntary return strategies for refugees by providing small grants for those who wish and are capable of going back. Hence, analysing the interaction and determining whether an intervention is conflict sensitive is not a straightforward exercise, and it requires an overview of the situation that is – as mentioned earlier – determined by the scope of the initial context analysis.

Moreover, during the analysis, the bases on which practitioners determine whether a conflict (at any level) is being mitigated or aggravated are vague and heavily reliant on the personal opinions and experiences of those conducting the analysis – especially if they are local and are affiliated or have empathy with a certain side – or the positions and interests of their organisations.

For example, if a certain intervention is shifting power or resources in favour of a party that the analyst is supportive of, she will assume – let us say in good faith – that this intervention is mitigating the conflict by putting eventually an end to it despite temporary escalation. Hence, this intervention would be perceived as conflict sensitive by her, while it will be perceived in the opposite way by someone holding opposing opinions.

Worse than that is the assumption that international or expat analysts would be more neutral and objective in their analyses than local analysts. This overlooks the fact that no person is free of his or her personal values, history and backgrounds, and the influence of their organisations.

# C- Acting upon this understanding to mitigate harm and enhance good

One substantial dilemma that needs to be unpacked prior to CS action planning, is related to the very concept of conflict. Should organisations interfere to mitigate any conflict, or some conflicts are necessary to achieve social change, even if caused or intensified by a humanitarian or development intervention? Does CS mean avoiding all conflicts, or some conflicts? Although these questions are not exclusive to conflict sensitivity, dealing with them, when thinking of CS actions, is unescapable.

Also, acting upon the new understanding of the interaction, requires those in charge to assume the new impact of their new actions. Hence, agreeing on certain actions or measures depends, on the one side, on different understandings of what might improve or cause more harm to a certain context (a similar challenge to point B). On the other side, it depends on how an organisation prioritises its immediate goals (e.g. emergency aid) over its possible long-term impact (e.g. social cohesion).

Additionally, the framework of CS can be frustrating, especially for field staff whose influence on programmatic or policy issues is almost non-existent. Although the effect of front-liners is of utmost importance, especially when it comes to communicating with refugees and host communities, multiple distinct layers of CS actions (policy, institutional, programmatic, and individual) are not emphasised. This in turn does not encourage small individual steps and leaves field staff with feelings of frustration.

The aforementioned points represent intellectual and conceptual challenges that might be leading to practical ones among those concerned with applying or promoting the principles of conflict sensitivity in the field. Thus, this approach avoids laying the blame with CS practices alone, but helps to think critically about the way in which this concept is being developed and presented.

The following section focuses on the application of the concept of CS. It shares stories collected from the field that show how humanitarian interventions might affect social peace dynamics in Lebanon and Syria based on grassroots perspectives.

## Section 2: Field observations and grassrootsarratives:

During 70 workshops and trainings delivered by House of Peace in three years (2015 – 2018), around 690 participants from different backgrounds – coming either from local communities or NGOs – shared several stories of social conflicts that they encountered or witnessed in their areas.

All stories that highlight issues related to conflict sensitivity were gathered and categorised, and a sample of these stories was discussed in two roundtables  with different concerned stakeholders. These discussions informed the writing of this paper and aided in the development of all recommendations and best practices.

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[5] The roundtables were held on the 19th of July and 10th of Aug 2018 in Beirut in Lebanon. They were attended by more than 30 participants coming from local and international organizations and NGOs, researchers, and community activists.

# A- Stories Criteria:

As per House of Peace understanding, social peace is defined as "a constructive state of intra and inter-communal relationships in a certain area, which are manifested through positive attitudes and behaviours, that reflect the predominant perceptions of one community towards the other, or among people from the same community, regardless of their political, social, economic or religious backgrounds".

Based on the HOPe approach and its definition of social peace, the storytelling part of the workshops focuses on issues affecting relationships between refugees and those with their host communities. Participants were asked to share any story they felt comfortable with that shows an incidence of social conflict or disputes in their areas. These stories are very diverse, and they span a large spectrum of topics.

It was necessary for the purpose of this paper to identify those which are related to conflict sensitivity. In this vein, and because House of Peace is concerned with social peace as defined earlier, the identified stories pivot around NGOs' impact on the socio-economic dynamics that are caused by the refugee crisis, which affect the perceptions of one community towards the other, rather than the possible impact of NGOs' interventions on the original armed conflict in Syria or Lebanon.

In other words, the scope of the HOPe CS analysis is focused on the humanitarian impact on the social repercussions of the refugee crisis, and not on the trajectories of the armed conflict.

All identified stories include both a conflict and an NGO. Some of these stories might appear at first sight as simple malpractice and not directly related to a conflict sensitivity issue. However, knowing that not all effects are immediately visible, some of these malpractices deliver Implicit Ethical Messages  (e.g. disrespect and mistrust, impunity of humanitarian workers, and powerlessness of refugees) to both refugees and their host communities. Hence, these stories were also included in the roundtable discussions that preceded the development of this paper.

Highlighting the scope of HOPe analysis and the criteria of selected stories is very important, as elaborated in the previous section.

# B- Field Observations and grassroots stories

In general, and before going through the stories, it is worth mentioning that field observations reveal that barely any organisations conduct any context analysis – regardless of its scope – of the area where they intend to intervene, not to mention updating previous analyses.

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[6]Do No Harm: How Aid can Support Peace – or War, Mary B. Anderson, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, February 1999.

However, 90%, 99%, and 87% of participants affiliated with a total of 16 NGOs have expressed in three different surveys that the facilitated 3-day analyses with House of Peace have helped them learn new things about their contexts, even though many of them had been working in them for several years.

This is to say that even simple analysis, which does not require big budgets or extraordinary expertise, is very helpful, even for field staff who have been working in a certain context for a long time, as it helps to reach a better understanding of the conflict dynamics, connectors and dividers.

Selected stories were categorised under 9 interlinked themes:

# 1- Relief standards and aid distribution:

One of the main issues that are causing tensions among refugees and with their host communities is the distribution of aid. Many stories describe incidents of clashes between people against the background of unclear or unjust aid criteria and procedures when registering, receiving or taking someone off a distribution list.

> " A local NGO team visited a camp and asked the residents to register their names and those of their neighbors for oil distribution. One of the residents wasn't present in the camp and his neighbors didn't register his name. A verbal conflict started between neighbors and escalated to a physical one. This tensed relationship lasted for 8 months until one of the camp residents interfered and solved the conflict.

Other stories show conflicts at the distribution sites, either between refugee families, or with host community members. Most of these incidents occurred primarily due to a lack of organisation or logistical capacity on the part of the NGO at the distribution site, which usually results in fights between those waiting for hours to register for or receive aid. Having said this, other conflicts were due merely to bad behaviour of those attending these events.

> " One day, in a camp in Akkar and during distributing aid for refugees, a lot of people gathered and waited from 7 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon without receiving anything. Then, people decided to send a group of men to ask the responsible about the reasons of the delay. When the group approached him, he started shouting at them and then he pulled out his gun and shot in the air. A local TV was in the area and they reported the incident as: "refugees attacked a distribution center.

## 2- Attitudes and behaviours of humanitarian workers

Staff attitudes and behaviours have a tremendous – positive and negative – impact on the context when working with local communities and local authorities. On many occasions, participants who are NGO staff expressed that they often underestimate the weight of the language and terms they got accustomed to using when approaching refugees, host communities and key figures. Many conflicts erupted, worsened or were settled due to an attitude or a behaviour of an NGO staff.

> " An aid worker denied a refugee woman from her share of food basket though she was waiting her turn like everyone else due to an argument between them. She decided to complain to his colleague, and that made him angry and he decided to take her off the recipients list, but his colleague prevented him from doing that.

The wrong message that could be passed to the people during this incident, is that those in charge of a certain service (in official and unofficial institutions) have absolute power on those receiving it. This implies an impunity of humanitarian workers as well.

Roundtables participants also said that some security guards at UN agency centres are unprofessional and arrogant, but that their complaints were met with the response that the security guards belong to a private company and "we can't do anything about it". These negatives attitudes harm the image of all humanitarian workers, because what people experience at any organisation centre is attributed to that organisation.

At the same time, several disputes were resolved through the intervention of some NGOs' staff members who played the roles of key figures, based on the trust they gained in their areas.

> " A teenage girl talented in soccer who lives in Tripoli, was forbidden to play the game by her father after many complaints from neighbors and relatives since a girl playing football is against their traditions. A social activist who has being working in the area for many years and who was trusted and respected by the community decided to interfere and spoke to the father. The father was eventually convinced, and permitted his daughter to play again. Now she is playing with the Lebanese national team and also playing with the local team in Tripoli. She became an idol for her fellows.

This case is a great example of how personal attitudes and credibility can bring a positive change to a certain community beyond the direct impact of the initial intervention.

# 3- Values and cultural differences

One of the issues that was raised several times by participants, is the issue of values and cultural differences. NGO participants agreed that they sometimes experience a dilemma between respecting local norms and values, and the promotion of women's and children's rights and other "progressive" ideas within the communities where they work.

> " A married woman that benefit from an NGO program, felt in love with a friend of a member of that NGO. They asked for protection and support to get the woman a divorce. However, another staff member was a friend of the husband and he informed him about what was happening. People of the community interfered and threatened the protection team. The woman disappeared and managed to get protection through another agency. She got a divorce later with the assistance of a lawyer. This story caused tremendous tension inside that NGO and with their community.

With the available information, this story does not seem to represent an example of women's empowerment. But it definitely shows differences in values and ethics between the protection team and the community. Other examples of tensions within families due to women's empowerment programs were very common.
However, not all relevant stories were due to serious differences in values. Some of them were simply caused by ignorance of local specificities or neglect of proper coordination.

> " During an outdoor activity, a group of youth approached female volunteers and harassed them verbally. The volunteers didn't know that the community was very conservative, so they didn't take this into consideration the way how they dressed up. Moreover, they chose the location of the activity to be next to the mosque. The music and the noise bothered the Sheikh who went out and forced people to boycott the activity.

Although this conflict might have disappeared once the volunteers left the area, its impact might persist in front of other NGOs intending to implement activities in the same area.

# 4- Communication and transparency

The way NGOs are perceived in Lebanon, especially by host communities, has a lot to do with the latter's attitudes towards refugees. Although numerous NGOs work in fields other than relief and aid, the predominant perception is that they all distribute cash and in-kind support to refugees, as expressed by many humanitarian workers. This issue increases tensions between both communities and NGOs. According to the participants, this is due mainly to weak communication methods and lack of transparency in some cases.
Roundtable participants also agreed that the language used by NGOs' media is a very sensitive issue.

> **"** In one camp, an NGO installed a poster on a wall with a controversial language, which caused a conflict with the camp residents, because it was misunderstood. The NGO that was responsible of the project had to close its office and couldn't open it back until they got the approval of the local community later again.

Other conflicts erupt sometimes due to weak coordination with local authorities.

> **"** A conflict rose between the head of a municipality in western Bekaa and an NGO that didn't inform him about an activity they were planning for with the refugees in his village. He got furious and decided to take action against the refugees since he didn't have the leverage or the benefit to take action against that NGO.

## 5- Use of resources

Resources are also considered one of the main issues that contribute to increased tensions between refugees and host communities. These stories were distinguished from those related to aid distribution in order to shed light on different types of poorly executed interventions that might not take into consideration the use of available resources.

A roundtable participant expressed that the source of funds indicates to a great extent how the funds will be used. Unfortunately, on many occasions, funds are used without taking into consideration local tensions and inter-community dynamics.

> **"** "In Homs, NGOs reconstruction operations are being carried out mainly for religious buildings. And Churches are being rebuilt faster than mosques since most funding is coming from Christian organizations. This issue is raising tensions among local communities".

More local stories shed light on the different aspects of the use of resources and its potential for conflict.

> **"** A conflict between an NGO and a local supermarket owner grew because the former decided to stop dealing with that particular supermarket because of the availability of a cheaper supplier. The supermarket owner threatened the NGO staff and the conflict led to the intervention of a Lebanese security official. It was agreed to purchase a bulk load for the last time and then terminating the contract between them.

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To be fair, this story might not be the result of a fault on the part of the NGO. Nevertheless, it tells us how sometimes exclusive contracts – though they might be following proper procedures – could cause tensions in impoverished areas, and might deny other local markets of their share of the economic cycle. This unintentional negative impact is exactly what conflict sensitivity is about.

During the roundtables, similar stories were heard about certain areas where influential contractors and who are known to be troublemakers in their areas, deny agencies access unless they give them exclusive contracts.

> " A conflict rose between the residents of the camp and the landlord. It was about raising the rent from $ 1,500 to $ 10,000. Raising the rent was a result of the Shawish's suggestion to use the land for work investments. The camp residents resorted to an UN agency and the security forces to find a solution that satisfies the two parties. The agency intervened directly and negotiated with the landlord to keep refugees in the camp. They agreed on the amount that was split between the camp residents and the agency that paid a much higher portion.

Although this intervention solved the conflict, what could be dangerous in this case is giving incentives to other landlords or Shawish to act similarly.

On the other hand, material resources could also be used to alleviate tensions in local communities

> " In a Palestinian camp, some neighbours got into a verbal fight with each other about garbage. But there was a misunderstanding. One of the neighbours was taking care of the street being clean, he wanted to bring new garbage bins, paint the walls and plant some flowers. The other neighbour thought that he wanted to throw the garbage on their side of the street and didn't want to listen to what he was offering. Two UNRWA staff helped and brought a big garbage bin and picked up all the trash. Other families from the neighbourhood intervened and the issue was sorted out.

# 6- NGOs cooperation and networking

Competition between NGOs gives a very negative implicit message to the communities they serve. It implies that NGOs don't share the same ultimate objective of helping them. Rather, they appear to be merely concerned with reaching their targets and reducing people to numbers in their reports. This causes a lot of harm to the trust that is being built between NGOs and their served communities.

> During a PSS session for kids organized by an NGO in a camp, another organization came to the place at same time and started distributing aids (food , toys… ) without coordinating or notifying the other NGO. Kids fled the PSS session to get aid from the second organization. Tension erupted between both NGOs. After this incident the camp residents asked the NGO working in PSS to leave the camp and not come back because they are not really helping, but only "selling them words.

## 7- HR policies and recruitment:

During the conflict sensitivity analysis, recruitment, HR policies and salaries were identified by participants as important causes of tensions in their communities. In some NGOs, for example, participants expressed that recruitment was exclusive to people from one background regardless of their capacities.

Moreover, hiring people from big cities to work in the peripheries raises resentments among locals who want their children to benefit also from these opportunities.

## 8- Activities and programming

Activities' content might be sensitive or insensitive to local specificities, as mentioned earlier in the "values" section. However, this is not the only factor that might affect local dynamics. For instance, the audience of these activities and the way they were recruited and organised have a lot to do with the tensions between refugees and their host communities.

> In one incident in Bikaa, a local NGO organised a cleaning campaign for the area as an awareness activity for refugee kids. Once the kids started singing, dancing and sweeping, a group of kids from the local community approached them and started a fight. A local barber intervened to make things just worse by engaging with the trainers who were accompanying the refugee kids. Afterwards, bypassers intervened and settled the conflict, and the campaign was ended. However, the tension between the kids hasn't been sorted out and clashes between them erupted few days after the campaign.

When analysing this conflict, participants agreed that one of the main causes was ignoring rather than involving the local children, which made them jealous. Participants interpreted their violent attitude as an expression of their need to be involved in the NGO's activities.

Another similar example:

> In wady Khaled, a group of volunteers decided to organize some activities for kids during Eid Al-Fotor. Since their budget was limited, they decided that the activities will target refugee kids only. During the implementation, kids from the local community felt frustrated because they were forbidden to participate, and they sabotaged the team possessions and eventually forced them to leave the area.

On the other hand, some activities provide safe spaces for participants from different backgrounds to express their different points of views, and allow them to understand each other, which had a positive effect on their perceptions of one another.

> **"** During a social peace workshop in Akkar, two women (participants) with no previous contact, discovered that the cousin of one of them had killed the brother of the other one before. They suddenly started yelling and blaming each other. The trainer contained the situation and convinced them to continue the workshop, and they did. They implemented a social action project together after the training and their relation became much better.

# 9- Exit strategies

During most conflict sensitivity analyses, the vast majority of participants indicated that they did not know what an "exit strategy" was and, when it was explained to them, they indicated that they had never thought about it before.

This accurately reflects the situation in the field. Hardly any organisation works on paving the road for its programs and services to be handed over effectively to local institutions or local communities when the organisation ceases working in their area.

One story from Tripoli illustrates this problem.

> **"** "A park that was renovated in a conflict area (between Jabal Muhsen and Bab el-Tabbaneh) for kids from both sides to come together, was totally abandoned once the NGO that was responsible for the project had left the area. Soon later, the park turned into a breeding ground for drugs and other substances abuse by kids and youth. Not only that, youth gangs took the park as a location, and they started fighting against each other with white weapons, which led to the interference of adults from both sides, and the escalation of old conflicts".

Creating dependency on a service within local communities and then abruptly terminating it has caused backlashes, as was also reflected in some stories from Palestinian camps. This is not only due to economic dependencies. It is also a result of disempowerment, 'turning' people into aid recipients, and all the damage this does to one's culture, psychology and self-esteem.

**All the previous stories paint a picture of the situation in the field. They provide a rich source of lessons learnt that inform program design and implementation in a more conflict sensitive manner. Many negative effects could have been avoided by understanding local specificities and identifying sources of tensions or peace that already exist there.**

# C- Actual Conflict Sensitivity Measures

Based on field experiences, practical CS analyses have helped several NGOs to take concrete actions to make their projects more conflict sensitive. These steps were planned during the Conflict Sensitivity Trainings delivered by House of Peace for NGOs working on the refugee crisis.

The types of actions taken were very diverse. Some examples of these actions are: reviewing a media policy; developing the procedures of volunteers' recruitment; changing the selection criteria of beneficiaries; mapping and contacting other NGOs working in the same area; investing in public spaces; partnering with local NGOs and initiatives; involving formal institutions in program planning and development; conducting participatory context analysis, and much more[7].

The indirect impact of these measures, in addition to their direct positive impact on local communities, shows that CS is an applicable concept, and all small actions are important and should be encouraged.

## Section 3: Roundtables Inputs and Recommendations

Discussions that took place during two roundtables pivoted around the reasons why CS is not well-applied in the field, the challenges that face humanitarian workers, and the needs that must be met to move forward.

# A- Conflict Sensitivity Challenges:

Some of the main points that were raised during the discussions:

•	NGOs use emergencies as an excuse for not acting in a conflict sensitive way. Being solely concerned with achieving immediate results prohibits those in the field from sensing their intervention's longer-term impact. One result of this is creating dependency on some services among both refugees and host communities, because CS was not taken into consideration at all.

•	Conflict sensitive approaches cannot be applied to short-term projects. They require a longer period to ensure proper analysis and continuous evaluation. Unfortunately, most projects are designed on a yearly basis, and their indirect impact is hardly ever monitored or reported. Additionally, short-term programs provide temporary solutions to complex problems. Once the program ends, the same problems come to the fore again.

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[7]All mentioned steps were shared by participating NGOs with House of Peace team during the follow up meetings. The direct impact could not be measured as it goes beyond the capacity of HOPe.

•     Corruption at the local level in many municipalities creates problems with some mayors that NGOs have to deal with on a daily basis, which sometimes prevents them from implementing their activities in the way they believe better and more conflict sensitive.

•     When new staff members are hired, they are rarely – if ever – given orientation or direction on the specificities of the intervention area, or a training on how to react towards conflict situations they might face in the field.

•     When field staff are overwhelmed by their daily tasks, they have very limited abilities to observe the impact of their intervention. Thus, external evaluators or analysts – for conflict sensitivity purposes specifically – could be a good alternative to reach a better understanding of the situation.

•     Exit plans need funds in order to be well-implemented. Governmental institutions might take control of many projects when the crisis ends and that is something to be concerned about.

# B- Positive and negative impact in Lebanon and Syria

When reflecting on the most common positive and negative impacts of humanitarian and development projects in Lebanon and Syria, participants listed the points below based on their own experience and field observations:

| Negative | Positive |
| --- | --- |
| Raising tensions between different communities due to selection/exclusion criteria | NGOs' programs contribute to local capacity building and skills development, which is necessary for the post-conflict period |
| Reinforcing gender discrimination within some projects | Involving official institutions in some programs, which contributes to the development and capacity building of these institutions |
| Turning small local NGOs into family businesses, which harms the humanitarian and development work in general | Moving the wheel of the local economy |
| Creating dependency on provided services | Providing space for social engagement and leadership among youth |
| Reinforcing segregation between different communities by implementing projects along the same dividing lines (e.g inside/outside camps) | Raising awareness around social, environmental, political, and economic issues |
| Providing temporary solutions that do not address the root causes of problems | Preparing agents for peace supplied with knowledge, experience and tools |

| The normalization of policy gaps | Creating spaces for dialogue |
|---|---|
| The exclusion of some governmental institutions | Linking peacebuilding projects with development projects |
| Setting exit strategies that do not support local NGOs | |

**All these points highlight opportunities where harm can be avoided and advantages can be enhanced. Hence, based on this analysis, roundtable participants came up with the following recommendations which they think will contribute to advancing conflict sensitivity practices in the field.**

# C- Recommendations

**1**
Integrating conflict sensitivity in all program design stages, and allocating a budget to an annual (or bi-annual) context analysis, along with the establishment of continuous monitoring mechanisms.

**2**
The scope of the context analysis should take into consideration the political situation in general, and the factors that exist in the intervention area in particular.

**3**
Including conflict sensitivity trainings in the recruitment and capacity building process of all NGOs.

**4**
Increasing transparency in NGOs' communication with local communities, and avoiding false or misleading promises when presenting projects and programs.

**5**
Encouraging NGOs to exchange lessons learnt and conflict analyses they conduct in their intervention areas, and making these analyses sensitively accessible to all, as much as possible, especially through the promotion of existing online platforms (e.g. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria).

**6**
Avoiding censorship by all organizations and official institutions of data and information related to the refugee crisis.

**7**
Encouraging donors to promote consortium-based programs to enhance collaboration and coordination among NGOs with different mandates.

**8**
Applying participatory approaches in project design and exit strategy planning that include staff members from all levels and departments, concerned stakeholders, and participants from local communities (i.e. refugees and host community members).

**9**
Including government officials in CS capacity building programs to ensure best practices and sustainability.

**10**
Advancing humanitarian principles and values among all humanitarian workers and researchers.

# Conclusion

"The road to hell is paved with good intentions". Presumably, all humanitarian and development agencies have good intentions while designing and implementing their various programs. Yet, supplied with good intentions, NGOs might be paving the road for conflict situations to be prolonged or exacerbated, if conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm practices are not properly put in place. Conversely, NGOs that adopt and apply conflict sensitivity measures are capable of scaling up the impact of their programs beyond their initial mandate and intervention, by contributing to the amelioration of the situation in general.

Theorists, practitioners and conflict sensitivity experts need to reflect more on the concept, critically probe its shortcomings, and develop it with a bottom-up approach to ensure that new applicable tools and structures are presented to those working in the field.

At the same time, those in the field need to reflect regularly on their projects and their indirect impact, and to be aware that all programs have the capacity to reduce or increase conflicts in fragile contexts. This positive or negative impact is the result of the interaction between the context of their intervention and the different elements of their projects (resources, values, activities' content, attitudes and behaviours of the staff, communication, recruitment procedures and policies, selection and exclusion criteria, and their exit strategies). Being aware of this impact is essential to act accordingly in a timely and effective manner.

This is the responsibility of all humanitarian actors and workers on all managerial and field levels. Furthermore, governments and donor agencies need to revise their policies to ensure that they are supporting, not hindering, the adoption and application of CS. International and local organisations, agencies and NGOs should review their structures and procedures to integrate CS at all levels of program development and implementation. Projects should always be preceded by proper context analysis that should take into consideration local specificities. On top of this, frontliners need to acknowledge the tremendous impact of their attitudes and behaviours when dealing with each other and with members of local communities.

Furthermore, organisations of all sizes and mandates should improve communication to make sure that their conducted analyses cover the whole scope of the conflict (locally and regionally, politically and socially), and that they exchange this knowledge with each other.

Investing in the capacity building of NGOs' staff and government officials is of the utmost importance to ensure better application of CS principles, and sustainable solutions in the longer term.

Finally, conflict sensitivity, as an essential cross-cutting issue in the humanitarian and development fields, provides a great opportunity for all programs to contribute to social peacebuilding, each in their own way. As the ultimate goal of any intervention is to alleviate suffering, contribute to long-term development and ensure sustainability, the conflict sensitivity principles should guide and inform every step of the way, knowing that good intentions alone are not enough to help people and provide them with better opportunities.

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## Transforming & Connecting

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- Field observations and grassroots narratives
- Roundtables inputs and recommendations

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