



BETTER PROGRAMMING INITIATIVE - DO NO HARM



**How to do conflict-sensitive
context analysis**

Good programming and community engagement require a solid understanding of the local environment and of the role – both actual and perceived – that we play – whether we operate in a context with high levels of social instability, violence, and conflict, or more stable and predictable settings.¹ There is always a risk that our presence, activities, and community engagement can have negative unintended consequences.

To avoid unintended negative consequences (e.g. violence or discrimination), maximize impact and ensure access we need to understand the *connections* in a community and how our presence and activities influence them.

Gender and diversity analysis, protection mainstreaming, community engagement and accountability, and the Fundamental Principles all incorporate a *do no harm* approach (avoid unintended negative consequences). Within a *resilience framework*² they contribute to all the *building blocks*; a risk informed, inclusive, holistic, demand driven and people-centred community engagement.

It is however important to note that:

- *Contexts change*
- *We influence context*
- *(A changing) context influences risks and vulnerabilities.*

It is therefore important to continuously analyse context, learn and adjust. Data gathering and information and knowledge management is hence key.

Secondary data should be collected and form the base for selection of geographical focus areas, selection of communities, and guide the design of an integrated risk assessment³ which will give a baseline that can inform emergency need assessment in case of a humanitarian crisis. Secondary data sets should also be put together as part of preparedness activities to guide the design of emergency needs assessments.

Both integrated risk assessments and emergency need assessments (primary data collection) should be sensitive to existing social instability and conflicts, as well as tensions and conflicts that may have arisen as a result of our presence and community engagement.⁴

A general context analysis begins with looking at the broader picture, using secondary data. This includes:

- Origins of the modern state and its history, including colonial legacies, if any.
- Its relations with key neighbours and great power states.
- The overall domestic political situation, including the nature of the government, the party, political situation, the conduct of elections and the way in which average people interact with and experience government in their lives.
- Any *social struggles* between groups or regions over resources, territory or control of government, or discrimination or exclusion grievances.
- *Identity groups* (based on religion, caste, class or ethnicity, for instance), and how ideology, myths and symbols have been used to mobilize these groups should be included.
- *Religion and social and political ideology*: key beliefs, symbols and areas of sensitivity and respect.
- *The traditional social structures* used to manage conflict and uphold norms, and whether they are they still functional or influential.
- *Social norms* and codes governing public behaviour, dress and the interaction between men and women.
- The history of aid assistance.

1. The same context analysis is also the basis for good security management.

2. IFRC, [Framework for Community Resilience, 2014](#).

3. For example, IFRC Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA)

4. The original BPI was mainstreamed into IFRC policy, tools and guidance, and is still to be found in IFRC's *VCA toolbox*. It guides the user through a *connector and divider* analysis, which is carried out through a participatory workshop. This methodology is similar to the Local Capacity for Peace methodology. The BPI revision process found however that this methodology was seen to be too cumbersome and therefore not used. The ICRC Safer Access Framework is institutionalizing a context analysis with the purpose of understanding root causes of violence, and is an important and well-developed tool available to National Societies.



ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN CONFLICT AND VIOLENT CONTEXTS

Understanding the conflict

- Causes (structural/root/causes)
- Dynamics (current state and conflict scenarios)

Understanding armed groups

- Actor analysis (who they are)
- The resource base and war economy

To illuminate connections, motivations, sources of threat, and understand how various factors influence each other, and how multiple conflicts can be interwoven – a *detailed context analysis* should be undertaken.

Violence is preceded by tensions that may be less visible: the *deep divisions* and *fault lines* in a society. These too must be explored and understood. Data must thus be collected either through secondary sources, or as part of an assessment at community level to tell us something about the aspects of communities and its individual members, and how they relate.

At the centre of how human beings perceive and respond to tensions and conflict are:

- *Values* – what is important to me, to us and to others.
- *Power* – how much access and influence an individual or group has relative to others.
- *Wealth* – ownership of money and property, including land, often entrenching unequal levels of privilege and access to opportunity.
- *Identity* – how people define who they are and how they define others.
- *Systems and structures* – that create and maintain social, economic and political differences between people and that enable or undermine social cohesion, development and transformation.
- *Gender* – conflict and violence affect women and men differently; directly affecting their perspectives, perceptions and responses to conflict and violence.

These factors should be seen in relation to each other. For example, gender roles have to be analysed in relation to power structures and access to wealth. The analysis will be incomplete if for example, you look at social, economic and political structures without also analysing them from a gender perspective.

They can represent both connecting and dividing forces and should be analysed as either. The influence of community engagement on perceptions and behaviour of *connectors and dividers* should inform design, and redesign of the engagement.

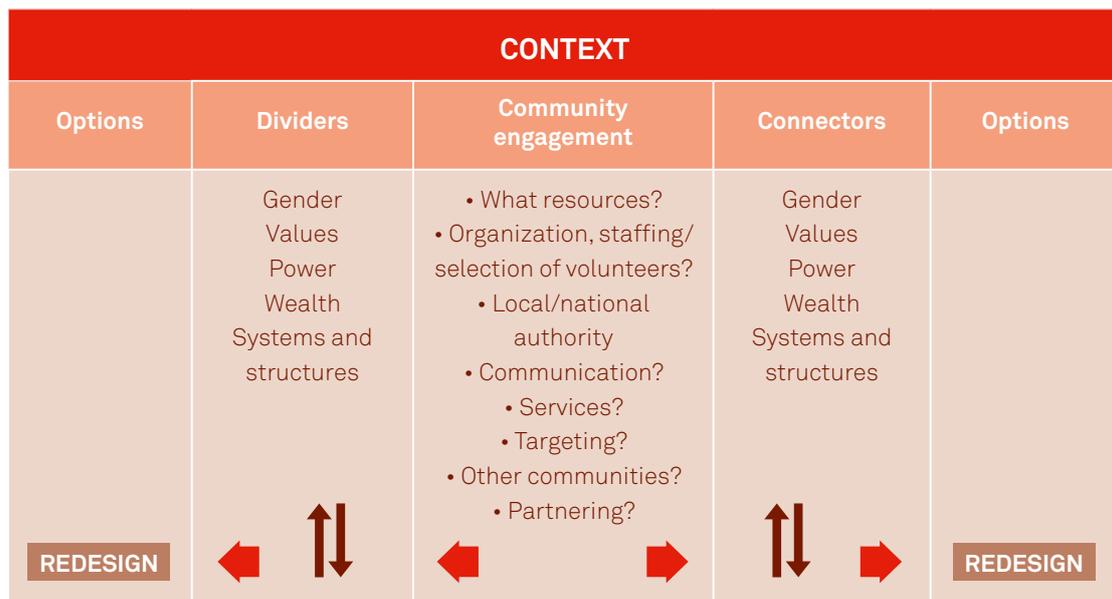
- A *connector* has an interest in building bridges across societal divisions, and therefore enhances the capacity for local peace building, creates connections between people and generates positive effect.
- A *divider* has a vested interest in maintaining tension or conflict – divisions – in a given context and feeds into the source of tensions, creating division amongst people and has a negative impact that can cause harm. A divider can also produce risk to the staff and the programme.

The column in the middle labelled *community engagement* is us bringing in resources, selecting volunteers and hiring staff, working closely with local and national authorities. It is about how transparent we are, and how we communicate, who we partner with, and what services we provide to whom. All these factors influence each other, and are again influenced by the factors described above (gender, values, power, wealth, and systems and structures).

As a minimum, always keep the following questions in mind:

- Are we being *inclusive* in our approach, and communicating with a *representative* selection of community members?
- How is our presence and actions being perceived – by whom and why?
- What are the longer-term, and also indirect, consequences of our actions?
- Are we non-intentionally putting someone at risk or increasing their vulnerability? (safety, lack of dignity, discrimination, lack of access to services and information)

And remember, *inaction* can also cause harm by exposing people to increased danger or ignoring abuse of their rights.



Adapted from: Marshall Wallace *Principle to Practice: A User's Guide to Do No Harm* (2015)



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