Operationalizing conflict sensitivity in complex contexts: **Lessons from Liptako-Gourma**

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
PAF	Protection Analytical Framework
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
DDG	Danish Demining Group
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
AG	Armed Group
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-governmental organization
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
RECOLG	Résilience et Cohésion Sociale des communautés transfrontalières du Liptako-Gourma (Resilience and social cohesion of cross-border communities in Liptako-Gourma)
SHIFT	Supporting Host Communities & IDPs to Facilitate Sustainable Transition towards inclusive solutions
DTS	Decentralized Technical Services

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OBJECTIVES OF THE PUBLICATION

The purpose of this document is to furnish Danish Refugee Council (DRC) personnel and partners with empirically -grounded guideline for operationalizing conflict sensitivity within project implementation and accross all sectors.

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This document is intented to facilitate discussion on how to operationalize conflict sensitivity in volatile and complex contexts and raises the following questions: Why is the conflict sensitivity approach important? What are the methods and approaches to adopt in light of the challenges specific to Liptako Gourma? What are the tools and expected results? Who are the most relevant stakeholders to include in the process? How can programming be optimally informed? And how can the process be improved? etc.

This document is inspired by the Conflict Analysis Guidelines and incorporates various internal and external tools. Additionally, it leverages DRC's extensive experience in implementing conflict sensitivity within Triple Nexus projects in the Liptako Gourma region, in collaboration with national and international partners.

Conflict sensitivity is a relevant approach for all intervention sectors, whether in the humanitarian, resilience, peacebuilding or development sphere. This approach becomes even more important in conflict zones.

Conflict sensitivity is an operational principle at DRC which concerns ALL DRC departments (so not just the programme teams).

Time spent asking the right questions and making choices with the right information to hand, as part of a conflict sensitivity analysis, will be time saved not having to deal with problems!
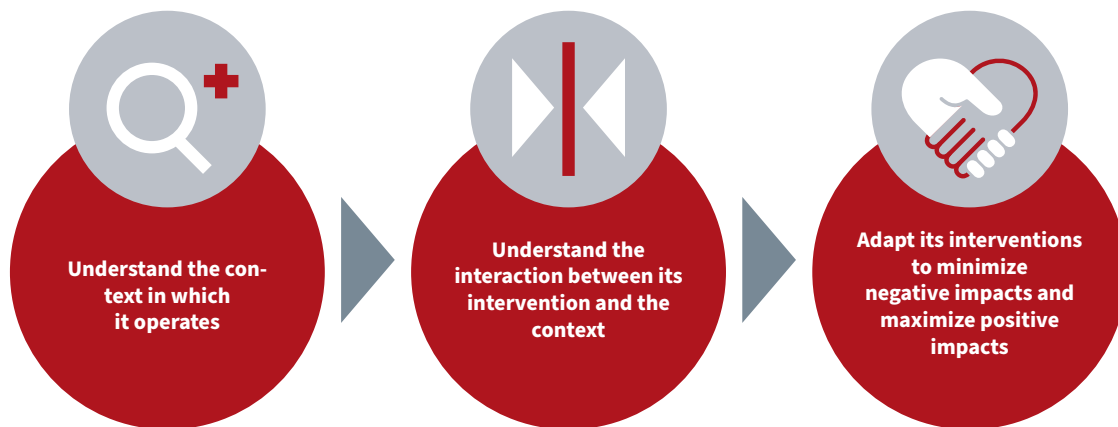
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INTRODUCTION

Any project implemented in fragile or conflict-affected situations — Whether humanitarian aid, peacebuilding and/or development project — must take care not to unintentionally aggravate existing conflicts or create new ones.

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On the contrary, it must seek to exploit the potential for strengthening social cohesion and peace. Accordingly, conflict sensitivity is a project tool allowing for more focused and informed observation of the contextual realities and their implications for programming.

The application of a conflict-sensitive approach is therefore a key step in reducing unforeseen consequences that could compromise the general objectives, of an organization or a project, and its chances of having a positive impact.

According to its definition[1], **conflict sensitivity** refers to the ability of an organization to:

Understand the context in which it operates

Understand the interaction between its intervention and the context

Adapt its interventions to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts

In other words, conflict sensitivity is about understanding the context to enhance the efficiency of planning interventions and tailor all organizational initiatives accordingly to the specific context. Such adaptation encompasses the way we intervene, our working structures and the principles, values and policies we implement.

Whilst it is generally acknowledged that conflict sensitivity is essential, its operationalization remains a key challenge for humanitarian and development organizations.

2.1. WHY IS CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IMPORTANT?

In fragile and conflict-affected contexts which are intrinsically complex, DRC works not only on the impacts of conflicts (emergency response) but also on the factors of conflicts (peacebuilding and lasting solutions)[2]. Interventions that are conflict-"insensitive" may fuel tensions, disputes and conflict, while increasing the risks for beneficiaries, staff and implementing partners. Understanding and

monitoring the interaction between our intervention and the local context are therefore an integral part of conflict-sensitive programming and can swiftly prevent potential negative impacts.

Conflict sensitivity is essential at every stage of the project cycle: design, implementation, monitoring and assessment, and learning. This includes, but is not limited to, procurement and human resources, communication and the conduct of staff in the implementing organizations.

1. DRC-DDG, Conflict Analysis Guidelines, July 2020, p. 1
2. Reference to DRC's three response platforms

2.2. ESSENTIAL IN A VOLATILE CONTEXT

The Liptako Gourma region which borders Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger is becoming an increasingly complex zone. The three countries making it up are considered by the INFORM RISK index 2023[4] to be among those with the highest crisis risk in the world. The Global Terrorism Index 2023[4] ranks Burkina Faso 2nd, Mali 4th and Niger 10th in terms of countries most impacted by terrorism.

Humanitarian organizations, while defending and acting according to principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, are often undermined in this precarious environment. The complexity and volatility of the context and underlying divisions expose them to diverse risks, despite their commitment to humanitarian principles. This is why it is crucial to understand that aid provided in a conflict-affected environment is not neutral. Aid and how it is administered can either aggravate tensions or promote peace between communities in conflict.

Conflict sensitivity thus becomes, in a context such as the one in the Liptako Gourma region, not only **desirable**, but also and above all **essential**.

> *Any humanitarian aid provided in a conflict-affected context inevitably produces effects on the dynamics of this conflict. These effects, which can be positive or negative, direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional, must be understood and addressed. DRC is determined to guarantee conflict sensitivity and strict compliance with the "Do no harm" principle and to systematically act in a way that minimizes any negative effects its interventions may have on conflicts while diligently working to maximize their potential positive outcomes.*

DRC-DDG, Conflict Analysis Guidelines, July 2020, Annex 16 - DRC Conflict Sensitivity Guidelines

3. https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index
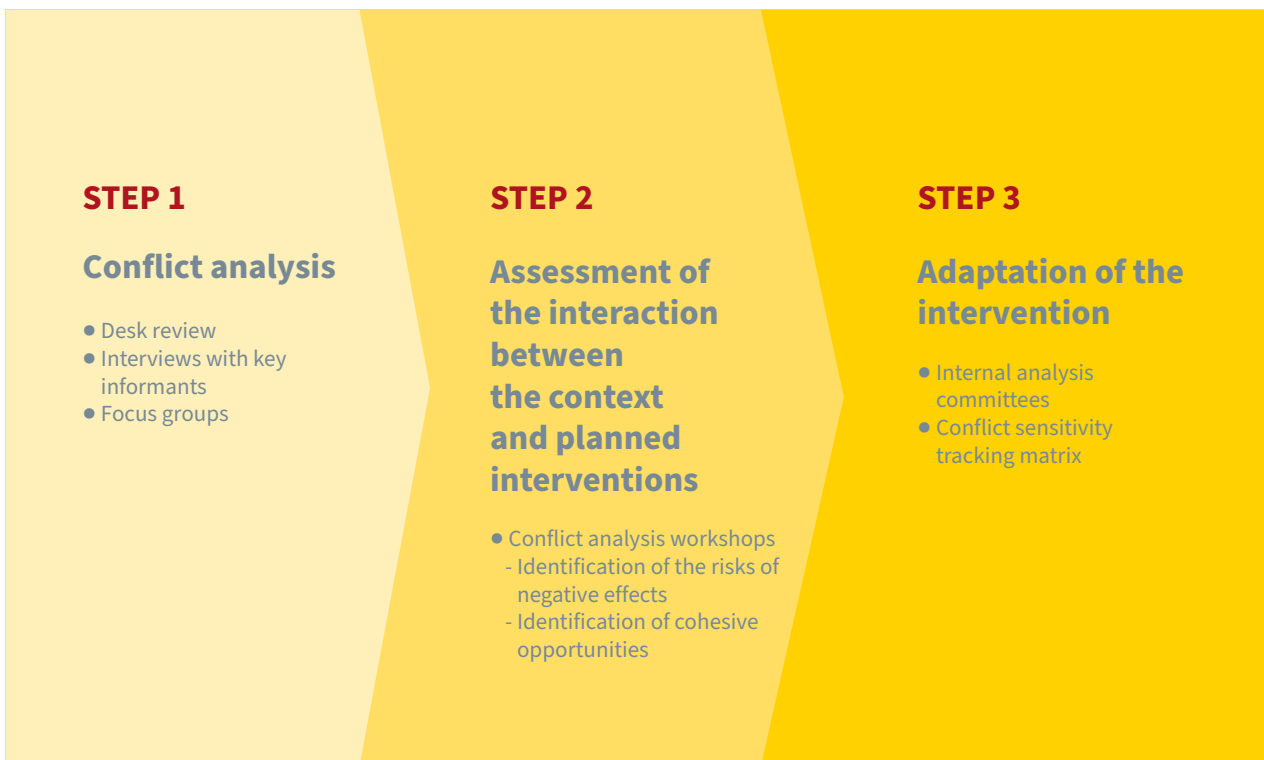4. https://www.economicsandpeace.org/reports/

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HOW TO OPERATIONALIZE CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

Any project implemented in fragile or conflict-affected situations — Whether humanitarian aid, peacebuilding and/or development project — must take care not to unintentionally aggravate existing conflicts or create new ones.

STEP 1

Conflict analysis

- Desk review
- Interviews with key informants
- Focus groups

STEP 2

Assessment of the interaction between the context and planned interventions

- Conflict analysis workshops
  - Identification of the risks of negative effects
  - Identification of cohesive opportunities

STEP 3

Adaptation of the intervention

- Internal analysis committees
- Conflict sensitivity tracking matrix

**STEP 1
CONFLICT ANALYSIS**

Conflict analysis refers to the systematic study of the context, causes, actors and dynamics of conflicts. It aims to understand what causes division (dividers) between groups and also looks at what connects these different groups (connectors) and enables them to co-exist peacefully, or at least manage the risks of violent conflict.

The initial step seeks to **understand the context in which an organization is working or intending to work**. Known as the **conflict analysis** stage, this process involves examining various aspects of conflict dynamics within a particular context. The analysis aims to understand, using a variety of tools and approaches, the causes/ sources of divisions between groups and the factors of conflict resilience present within these groups.

The objective is firstly, to pinpoint the structural or foundational causes that precipitate conflicts, along with the dynamics such as trends that serve as conflict sources (including historical conflicts, triggers, events, etc.); and secondly, to recognize the conflict actors- whether individuals, groups, or institutions-examining their relationships, positions, interests, and needs.

The analyses must be endogenous, carried out on the ground and not behind a desk. The views of the project's key local stakeholders must be taken into account in the conflict analysis, as long as this does not put them in danger.

A standard methodology of a conflict analysis might include, depending on the specific objective of the analysis, the time and resources available, the following:

▶ Desk review: examination of the project's strategic documents, documents about the municipalities concerned, reports on the humanitarian situation and the security context and conflict actors in the project's area of operation, etc.
▶ Interviews with key informants: individual interviews conducted using an interview guide with people who have knowledge of certain aspects of the context of a conflict.

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▶ Focus groups: with deliberately selected members (men, women, young men and young women; host communities, internally displaced persons; socio-professional groups, etc.) who participate in a facilitated discussion to gather their perceptions on a specific subject. Focus groups are essential to guarantee the participatory nature of conflict analyses and to verify information.[5]

See Annex 1 for examples of participatory tools for conducting conflict analyses. The detailed description of each tool and how they are used can be found in the DRC Conflict Analysis Guidelines.

Suggested structure of a conflict analysis report:

1. Overview of the conflict and general trends (particularly related to the conflicts);

2. The major conflict dynamics identified in the zone in question (history, the causes of the conflict(s), analysis of the actors involved, the diverse effects and implications not least for the most vulnerable groups, the sources of resilience to these conflicts, etc.)

3. The questions associated with conflict sensitivity (the risks of doing harm to avoid and the existing opportunities to contribute to the resilience of communities and to peacebuilding); and

4. The findings and recommendations (for the purposes of adapting the programming and which factor in the outlook and potential scenarios)

Conflict analyses require a very cautious and sensitive approach because of the often highly political nature of the information collected and because the different groups tend to interpret events in a contradictory manner. When dealing with governments or other agencies, it can sometimes be politically insensitive to use the term 'conflict analysis' or to raise issues of violent conflict. One way to get round this issue may be to avoid the word 'conflict' altogether, and to talk, instead, of 'dynamics analysis' for example.
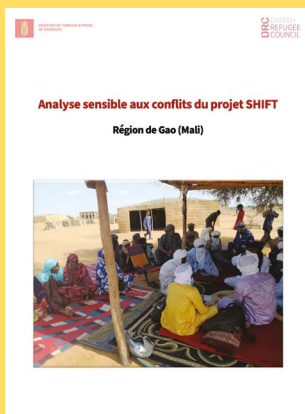
CONFLICT-SENSITIVE ANALYSES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SHIFT & RECOLG PROJECTS

From July to December 2021, sensitive analyses were performed as part of two Triple Nexus projects: SHIFT[6] (*Supporting Host communities and IDPs to Facilitate sustainable Transition towards inclusive solutions)* and RECOLG[7] *(Resilience and social cohesion of cross-border communities in Liptako-Gourma)* in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, both implemented as part of consortia.
The stated objective was to analyze the conflict dynamics of the project locations, identify the risks and potential sources of conflicts in connection with the programming and pinpoint cohesive opportunities to inform and adapt the strategies and interventions.

These analyses were the first step in a process (even though DRC and DDG in particular are known for their expertise on the subject) in which **conflict sensitivity formed a central priority of the interventions**.

The approach leveraged the technical and indigenous expertise of each consortium member, fostering sharing, collaboration, and complementary efforts.

This pivotal initial step establishes a knowledge foundation that will inform the second stage in the conflict-sensitive analysis: assessment of the interaction between the context and planned interventions.

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5. **Heterogeneous** *focus groups, i.e. those which bring people together across lines of division or conflict, are generally more challenging to manage but can be extremely useful under certain circumstances.* **Homogeneous** *focus groups are easier to manage and are generally advised, unless the team is highly familiar with the context and skilled in managing group discussions on conflict issues.*
6. *Consortium comprising DRC as project lead and seven partners: Réseau Billital Maroobe (RBM) and TASSAGHT in Mali, Association*
pour la Redynamisation de l'Elevage au Niger (AREN) in Niger and Conseil Régional des Unions du Sahel (CRUS), Association Formation Développement Ruralité (AFDR), Association des Femmes Juristes du Burkina Faso (AFJB) and Association Voute Nubienne (AVN) in Burkina Faso.
7. *Save the Children in consortium with CARE, DRC, KARKARA (Niger), the RBM and its members TASSAGHT, CRUS and AREN.*

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STEP 2
ASSESSMENT OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE CONTEXT AND PLANNED INTERVENTIONS

This second step is aimed at **more clearly understanding the interaction between our interventions and the context**. Building upon the insights from the conflict analysis, this step involves examining how these insights can better inform the design of the project or adjust the initially planned approach in the field. Indeed, because an intervention takes place within a particular context, and is not neutral, the latter's interactions and potential connections with this intervention must be understood and assessed.

This interaction can be assessed during **conflict analysis workshops** which, moreover, play a crucial role in guaranteeing the active participation of DRC staff and its partners' staff in the use of the conflict analysis findings. This assessment can strengthen the field teams' skills and abilities in terms of reflecting on the context and on the interactions between this context and the intervention. They may be solely internal to DRC or the project, or may include other similar organizations or other stakeholders (such as

state services, traditional leaders or other NGOs for example). This choice will depend on the context but it's highly recommended to host a workshop with the project staff as part of any conflict analysis process. If feasible, you might also want to plan additional workshops that are open to other relevant groups.

The **conflict analysis workshops** must make it possible to identify the **potential positive or negative effects** of interventions on **individuals**, **communities**, **organizations**, **institutions** and more broadly on **the environment** and vice-versa. The aim is also to identify which **initiatives, actions and decisions** are likely to create or **exacerbate** the negative effects and which **actors** are likely to be behind these. The workshop also takes into account those who play a **positive role** in **social cohesion** or **peace** within their community and the relevant mechanisms that exist in this regard.

A conflict analysis workshop may be held in accordance with the structure of the conflict analysis report (see step 1).

The assessment of the interaction between the context and the interventions is carried out at two levels to identify the risks of negative effects as well as the opportunities to contribute to cohesion and peace.

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STEP 3
**ADAPTATION OF THE INTERVENTION AND
CONFLICT SENSITIVITY MONITORING**

Through analyzing the interplay of context and our actions, conflict analysis workshops should also facilitate the generation of **options for adjusting interventions**. These options can span a wide range, such as relocating activities, redefining them, canceling, or adapting supply processes. Whether or not prior consent from the financial partner is necessary, what's crucial is ensuring the availability of one or more viable options.

Periodic review of conflict analyses is crucial to assess whether adjustments are needed for project activities and field approaches in response to contextual shifts. To facilitate smoother adaptation of programming and monitoring, frameworks and tools have been established.

1. Internal analysis committees

DRC has established **internal analysis committees**[8] to enhance the process of updating conflict analyses and to ensure that conflict sensitivity is given proper consideration.

They bring together a wide range of actors equipped with technical expertise in diverse sectors (programming, security and logistics) as well as in-depth knowledge of the dynamics specific to each location. Members are drawn from within the DRC or from partner organizations involved in a particular project. "External" resource persons may occasionally take part. In this case, however, depending on the profile of these external actors, it may not be possible for all the subjects to be addressed.

Internal analysis committees are tasked with:
1. Analyzing changes in the context/conflicts;
2. Assessing and monitoring, at regular intervals, the conflict sensitivity of the interventions; and
3. Holding strategic discussions with a view to adapting an intervention based on the challenges or urgency of the situation.

The **internal analysis committees** meet regularly (monthly or quarterly depending on the context and project requirements, and may also meet on an ad hoc basis to consider how to adapt a project in the event of an alert, incident or new dynamic which could drastically impact the interventions.

They help to enhance the knowledge of the teams and actors involved in the project about the conflict-sensitive approach and the risks associated with the interventions. They serve as a platform for raising awareness, enhancing capacity, and fostering knowledge exchange, ultimately enabling more informed interventions that are sensitive to conflict dynamics.

In regions with high volatility like Liptako Gourma, internal analysis committees offer project stakeholders an ongoing opportunity to assess the environment and address a multitude of challenges. These include issues like inaccessibility, blockades, worsening security conditions, and concerns regarding the nature or delivery of aid.

8. *Six (6) internal conflict analysis committees which cover 22 project municipalities in the context of the illustrative examples of SHIFT and RECOLG*

2. Intervention conflict sensitivity tracking matrix

The intervention conflict sensitivity tracking matrix enables ongoing monitoring of conflict dynamics in project locations, assessing their interaction with interventions, and fostering a proactive approach to programming adaptation. By continuously evaluating the impact of interventions on social cohesion, it also contributes to maximizing the positive outcomes of the initiatives undertaken.

Beyond informing the programming, it is also used by the internal analysis committees as a data collection tool in the context of updating conflict-sensitive analyses. The matrix has 2 tabs:

I. *Tab 1 on the risk-based adaptive measures*

Updated every quarter by the internal analysis committees, this tab provides a quick description of the security situation and allows for the conflict sensitivity of each field of action or activities of the project to be assessed.

This is a framework for assessing the context and identifying the risks and potential sources of tension, conflict, division and violence in connection with the field of action or the activity intended. This all makes it possible to detect and record all of the incidents encountered in the context of implementing the activities.

The members of the Internal Analysis Committees are also expected to suggest the most relevant mitigation measures for minimizing the risks identified whilst detecting and recording the opportunities existing in the given location in terms of institutions, mechanisms, actors or other resources, likely to be mobilized in the process of mitigating negative effects.

Example on mitigation measures

Risks and potential sources of division, tension and conflict	Incidents related to the activity	Examples of incidents or risk explanations	Mitigation measures	Opportunities and Recommendations
Price inflation, and repercussions on the vouchers distributed by the project which no longer cover the beneficiaries' basic needs	Tensions between selected shopkeepers and beneficiaries	Tensions ran high between beneficiaries and shopkeepers in connection with the rise in prices following the ECOWAS sanctions. The shopkeepers called for the voucher amounts to be revised. In response to the beneficiaries' complaints about the quantity of products supplied, they stopped providing the services. The beneficiaries were no longer able to buy their staple goods and ransacked a few shops. The shopkeepers then took it out on the project teams.	• Establish a framework for discussion between the shopkeepers and the beneficiaries to explain the price increases. • Assess the market prices and the possibility of revising the voucher amounts	Discuss with the region's shopkeepers' association to agree that the prices remain "fixed" for a certain period of time

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II. *Tab 2 on cohesive initiatives*

Another crucial consideration, which completes the two dimensions of conflict sensitivity, involves assessing how interventions impact social cohesion. The aim is to suggest, for each activity or area of intervention, their potential for helping to strengthen social cohesion and peace. Through specific exercises, the committee members assess and document the intervention/ activity's contribution to social cohesion and peace by sharing past positive experiences.

Based on this assessment and the positive experiences identified, proposals are made to capitalize thereon and to adapt these activities by associating them with social cohesion initiatives.

Example of an activity which could contribute to social cohesion

Activity	Proposals and examples of good practices identified	Opportunities and recommendation
Nutrition training for health workers	Health workers are actors who have a strong local foothold and some organizations call on them as intermediaries to implement activities in diverse sectors	• Take advantage of training to train health workers in peaceful conflict management, etc. • Combine this training with social cohesion activities, such as dialogue.

Example of an activity which has contributed to social cohesion

Activity	How?	Describe the conflict situation and how the action contributes to social cohesion or to an easing of tensions	Actors involved	Opportunities and Recommendations
Culinary demonstrations as part of a health-nutrition activity (28 project villages concerned)	The culinary demonstration activities played a large part in nurturing cohesion and understanding between new mums from diverse communities.	Existing divisions between villages on account of old conflicts. The situation had fomented division between communities that had no social interaction. This activity, which brought together 4 or 5 groups of a dozen women for each session, who generally came from 5 villages, encouraged them to mix and work together and created a sense of solidarity above all.	• Women beneficiaries of the graduation approach • Health workers • Field teams	Use these culinary demonstrations constructively, to develop the women's capacity to co-exist peacefully, in terms of their role as agents of peace, etc.

The matrix serves as a valuable supplement to conflict analyses. It offers a concise summary of programming implications, enables assessment throughout the programming cycle, and facilitates the identification of positive and negative interactions between the context and interventions. Additionally, it suggests relevant adaptive measures as dynamics evolve. In essence, it transcends being merely an assessment tool, functioning as a continuous mechanism for monitoring conflict sensitivity.

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EXAMPLES OF OPERATIONALIZATION OF CONFLICT-SENSITIVE ANALYSIS, CASES OF RECOLG AND SHIFT

During the implementation of the RECOLG and SHIFT projects, the operationalization of conflict-sensitive analysis brought to light adaptive measures for mitigating the risks identified and seize opportunities for promoting cohesion and peace.

Context analysis

Mapping of conflict dynamics in the areas of intervention of the RECOLG and SHIFT projects[9]

Various categories of conflicts have been identified, but given their stakes and frequency, four main dynamics emerge:

1. Conflicts associated with production systems and the natural resources they mobilize
2. So-called "communal" (intra- and inter-communal) conflicts
3. Conflicts associated with the presence of weapon bearers
4. Conflicts between host communities and internally displaced persons

The interrelationships among these four conflict dynamics are substantial. While access to or management of **natural resources** often divides the Liptako Gourma region, the **communal aspect** of the identified conflicts cannot be disregarded. In conflict analyses, many respondents frequently highlight this dimension. The participation of **armed groups and other weapon bearers** adds a new level of complexity and magnitude to these conflicts. Their actions greatly impact the displacement of **individuals and heighten pressure on natural resources**, thereby contributing to the complex interaction between internally displaced persons and **host communities**.

Assessment of the interaction between the intervention and the context

Thanks to deliberations through analysis workshops and focus groups with the communities of the project locations, especially women, youth, members of the host communities, internally displaced persons and market actors along with other socio-economic categories, as well as the documentation of experience of humanitarian actors and partners at local level: a certain number of risks and potential sources of tension, conflict and division in connection with the activities, fields of action and processes of development and implementation have been identified and documented in the two projects. The shared illustrations stem from the research and analyses conducted in 2021, as well as the discussions of the internal analysis committees.

I. *Identification of risks and potential sources of conflict, tension, division and violence*

Interventions, in some of their components or in the way they are implemented, are likely to create or exacerbate social and environmental problems. More specifically, the risks and potential sources of tension, conflict and division may be associated with these four dimensions, without being exhaustive:

1. Divisions of various forms
2. Humanitarian aid-related challenges
3. Insecurity associated with the action of weapon bearers
4. Programmatic quality.

NB: The risks identified are not related to the SHIFT and RECOLG projects. They have been identified based on the experience of humanitarian actors, beneficiaries, host communities and administrative and local authorities. Their consideration has made a significant contribution to the conflict sensitivity of the two projects.

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9. See more detailed description of the existing conflict dynamics in Annex 2.

1. Risks associated with divisions and affiliations

Any behaviour or suspicion of favouritism, discrimination or exclusion is prone to triggering tension or conflict and can lead to reprisals.

The *targeting of beneficiaries* becomes particularly complex in the zone of Liptako Gourma, and may be a source of tension, conflict or frustration within communities. The principle in itself is a question of choice, some individuals (or households) are targeted to the detriment of others, but the **affiliations** in particular, **grievances and resentment** associated with this can render targeting problematic.

Other factors related to targeting that may cause frustration and objections include:

▶ The origin of displaced persons. In camps, displaced persons group together often by affiliation in connection with their village of origin. As such, they may be very particular about the aid quota obtained by their "community", and exclusion or a very low percentage awarded may spark tension.

▶ Approach-specific targeting. Example of the graduation approach, which seeks to lift the beneficiaries, 15-24 year-old young men and women, out of poverty, and so empower them with a certain level of economic independence. This form of "social promotion" of more vulnerable populations is sometimes perceived negatively by non-beneficiaries.

▶ Entitlement effect – when the resources provided by aid elevate the standing of some actors, to the detriment of others. Sometimes, they pit local leaders against each other. At other times, they lend legitimacy to an actor who has no regulatory power to act.

▶ Distribution effect – when the targeting coincides with fault lines between groups in the context, the project fuels divisions and tension. This occurs when beneficiaries are consistently the same or when criteria for selection are unclear or opaque.

Example of exclusion of nomadic populations from the targeting process

Even in the context of pastoral activities, it can happen that nomadic populations are excluded from the process. There are various reasons why they are overlooked in humanitarian actions and projects. Some selection and award criteria are indexed particularly in the village-based distribution model. Because of their lifestyle, nomadic populations move around. Even when they are victims of attacks, they do not necessarily settle in sites for displaced persons.

Some local authorities, whether knowingly, unwittingly or through lack of information, do not necessarily consider nomadic populations as potentially eligible for aid and support, which also has to do with the question of land and citizenship - those who "do not have land" are often not considered as belonging to the community.

**ADAPTIVE MEASURE TAKEN:
Additional targeting
of pastoral households.**

Thanks to additional targeting, it was possible to remedy this and to reach beneficiaries who had not been taken into account during the first targeting phase, including categories who are often marginalized, such as shepherds, but also internally displaced persons in host families.

The **choice of shopkeepers, suppliers** and **other service providers** is just as important. This may vary depending on the context, but the beneficiaries seem to favour local resources. Care should be taken, however, to vary service providers and to ensure an even distribution of choices among the various ethnic groups or others present. It is also important to anticipate the market effects (risk of triggering changes in supply or demand, and the resulting hikes/falls in price).

Often based on perceptions which do not necessarily reflect reality nor the objectives of humanitarian actors, these sources of tension are a result of misunderstandings because of poor communication.

Clear communication regarding all aspects and activities of the project is crucial. All activities possess the capacity to either promote peace or trigger conflict, extending beyond just targeting efforts

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2. Humanitarian aid-related challenges

When operating in contexts marked by scarcities, disparities, and conflicts—whether underlying or overt—**humanitarian aid organizations become embedded elements within these environments**. What they do, and how they do it, can – and does – lead to harmful effects, especially by stirring up existing tensions or by weakening factors that contribute to the resilience of conflict-affected communities. However, humanitarian aid also has the potential to mitigate conflict and bolster resilience, often by reinforcing bonds and factors that unite individuals across conflict lines, even if this isn't the primary goal of their programs.

Examples of risks and inherent dilemmas to be considered in fragile and conflict-affected contexts

▶ **The definition of "vulnerability".** In light of the number of people who need protection, the often low quotas of beneficiaries can represent a source of conflict. Everyone wants to benefit from aid and, as such, the definition of vulnerability is a key consideration.

▶ **Manipulation of aid.** The interference of actors of influence (e.g. local authorities, but also community leaders) can be a source of protests, grievances and tensions. The diversion of aid for political purposes, exclusion of certain communities, unequal distribution of aid by the latter or the inclusion of individuals who do not meet the criteria to the detriment of more vulnerable people are just some examples.

▶ **The inclusion or non-involvement of local authorities,** depending on the specific issues and context, can be a source of tension, conflict, lack of participation or other barriers.

▶ **Substitution effects.** The resources provided by the aid relieve the competent actors of their responsibility and their role, compounding the deep-rooted causes of conflicts (such as by heightening the perception of the State's absence or of political tactics).

▶ **The service provider selection process.** Beyond the aforementioned divisions, the associated financial stakes can stoke jealousy, avarice, tension and frustration. Influence peddling, perceptions of fraud, manipulation or issues with the quality of the service provided have also been identified as sources of frustration, tension and protest.

▶ **The effect on the market.** When the resources or services provided drive demand on the local market up or down, the intervention stirs up new factors of tension (price rises, insufficient supply, unfair competition). For example, beneficiaries often think that price fluctuation is caused by shopkeepers becoming aware of the availability of vouchers.

▶ **Mobilization of natural resources.** Owing to the issues and conflicts associated with natural resource access, control and management, their mobilization for interventions incurs a certain number of risks.

Example of exclusion of nomadic populations from the targeting process

In support schemes for livestock breeding and agriculture sectors, there must be awareness of the conflict issues surrounding land, transhumance corridors, water access or insecurity, which is rife in the locations.

The granting of sheep, goats or cattle risks influencing these dynamics primarily in terms of:
- Reduced grazing or feeding areas and increasing pressure on such resources as water, ponds and on the search for fodder
- The perceived value of livestock, with the recurrence of livestock theft by AGs
- Complaints and disputes over rural damage caused by livestock

The development of sectors like market gardening for a community of displaced individuals means facilitating their access to land in an environment where "land" is a major source of tension and conflict and where the degree of cohesion does not necessarily inspire trust.

The granting of seeds has knock-on effects on the market, particularly as regards supply and demand, or an increase in prices.

▶ The effects of misuse or theft. The resources provided by the aid may be diverted, stolen or exchanged for protection needs. Some activities, such as cash transfer (but not exclusively) bring with them a heightened risk of fraud, misappropriation or extortion.

▶ The messages perceived. Behaviour associated with the aid may deepen tensions and fault lines if the messages perceived are lack of respect, lack of transparency, lack of fairness or lack of accountability.

3. Insecurity associated with the action of weapon bearers

The activities of weapon bearers, — be they regular armed forces, armed groups (AGs) or armed bandits —, affect humanitarian actors, beneficiaries and communities in general.

Examples of risks associated with the presence of weapon bearers:

▶ **The risk of being considered "complicit".** Populations may face interrogation after benefiting from a project activity, feel unable to speak freely, or avoid contact with state representatives due to fear of reprisals.

▶ **The presence of explosive devices** along roads increases the risks for beneficiaries whose participation in activities which are "relocated" for security reasons requires increasing travel.

▶ **Crime, organized crime and attacks** particularly along roads and in some markets, or on fair days, also pose risks for selling the production of sectors developed by project beneficiaries.

▶ **Grievances, resentment and suspicion of links** with armed groups as well as perceived injustice and abuse associated with the processing of cases of theft are increasingly sources of conflict and tension within communities

▶ **The potential diversion of aid for criminal purposes** in locations under the control of armed groups, who require the populations to pay "taxes". In a context where members of armed groups are difficult to identify and where interactions are difficult to control, it is also quite possible that beneficiaries or service providers are in some way involved in dealings with members of these armed groups.

▶ **The relocation of activities owing to the security context** which forces the beneficiaries to have to travel on roads that pose a risk or which are under the control of armed groups

Example of risks associated with relocating activities

- Beneficiaries who pay (form of tax), willingly or forcibly, the services of armed groups for their protection or safety, during travel
- Targeted attacks on market access routes, on markets or on days when provisions are distributed (whether foodstuffs or money)

🔍 **ADAPTIVE MEASURES TAKEN: Review of the intervention arrangements concerning some activities**
(support for Decentralized Technical Services (DTS), cash transfers or activities requiring groups of individuals, etc.)

1. Involvement of other actors in the operational implementation (DTS support staff, setup or use of focal points, local intermediaries, guardians, "mamans lumières": community volunteers who support mothers to fight malnutrition in children, etc.).
2. Combination of several activities to lower the security risks and achieve the goals set (distribution of money and essential provisions combined with dialogue sessions, setup of a multi-purpose cattle feed bank, etc.)
3. Relocation of activities to sites considered to be "safer" or where the authorities, community leaders, DTS or displaced beneficiaries are located
4. Additional assessments of the market prices to ease shopkeeper-beneficiary tensions, at-risk fairs and markets, etc.
5. Taking advantage of the local links (foothold and acceptance of consortium members, promotion of endogenous systems, etc.)

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4. Programmatic quality

In a context characterized by heightened violence, tension, suspicion, and negative perceptions, it becomes even more crucial to implement projects in a professional, inclusive, and transparent manner. This is essential because the interventions themselves have the potential to either alleviate or escalate tensions. Therefore, the attitudes, professionalism, and communication of project participants are essential in ensuring an effective conflict sensitivity strategy.

Examples of risks associated with programmatic quality:

▶ **Failure to consult or include** certain stakeholders, especially host communities or minorities, can lead to frustration and negative perceptions of project actors, as well as mistrust due to lack of participation

▶ **Inadequate communication** about the project and its activities, resulting in misunderstandings, can contribute to conflict dynamics. Poor communication about the criteria for selecting targets or the distribution arrangements and timeframes, as well as a lack of clarity regarding ration distribution registers which lead to confusion and disputes, have particularly come under scrutiny.

▶ **Delays between targeting and distribution, and provision of outdated or substandard products,** are all factors that lead to tension between beneficiaries, service providers and project actors.

▶ **The poor execution or operation of the project**, failure to honour commitments or a lack of transparency and their impacts on the beneficiaries can put project actors at risk of potential reprisals.

▶ **The lack of consideration of traditions and customs**. As part of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) for example, complaints have been lodged in connection with loan repayment interest, which is deemed to be at odds with religious precepts.

II. *Identification of opportunities to contribute to cohesion and peace*

The insights gained from conflict-sensitive analysis should be leveraged to bolster social cohesion. This involves leveraging cohesive opportunities identified within specific locations, such as themes and actors who can support the process. **The objective is to evaluate opportunities for reducing tensions and strengthening positive relationships, while considering adjustments that may need to be made during the project implementation.**

▶ **Identify the conflicts and tensions regarding which we could play a positive role**

For the SHIFT and RECOLG projects, c**onflicts and/or tensions regarding which we could play a positive role** were identified. Examples include:

▶ **Conflicts over the use of natural resources.** Concerning their recurrence, and specifically the issues associated with the development of particularly market gardening and cattle sectors in the project, the aim was to help to prevent and ease these tensions and conflicts depending on the dynamics in each location. Various themes for dialogue were identified and developed in relation to these issues, including:
- Roaming of animals
- Access to feed (felling trees, picking Acacia pods and straw)

- Obstruction of water points
- Rural damage
- Capacity-building among actors, not least village heads who hold the "power of conciliation"

▶ **Conflicts between host communities and IDPs**, particularly to assess the effects of displaced persons' movements in the intervention locations (conflict dynamics likely to be transposed in the arrival location, those caused by the movements and stigma and confusion often identified, etc.).

▶ **Leadership conflicts between young people** with repercussions on the whole community and cycles of violence for a project, whose primary targets are: 15-24 year-old young men and women, etc.

**ADAPTIVE MEASURE TAKEN:
Consideration of conflict sensitivity in the dialogue processes**

The terms of reference for facilitating dialogue now include a scope for assessing conflict sensitivity and the management of risks associated with the activity in each location and in light of the dynamics.

In one of the intervention municipalities, through the conflict-sensitive analysis it was possible to identify the tensions/risks of conflicts between two ethnic groups at a very early stage (which had come about because of one of the group's suspected collusion with the AGs and cycles of reprisals that followed). Owing to the sensitivity of the matter, it was decided to facilitate dialogue in direct connection with the activities associated with VSLAs. These dialogues paved the way to an action plan on the basis of mitigation solutions suggested by these two groups.

Attention must also be paid to the conflict dynamics that have the most significant impact on interventions, even when the project actors are unable to take direct action due to their mandates, humanitarian principles, or security concerns.

▶ **Identify the most relevant themes and actions in relation to the planned interventions**

The objective is to determine the most effective themes and actions for preventing and resolving conflicts, considering both the divisive factors that spur engagement in violence and those that foster cohesion and peace.

In light of the division factors that encourage engagement in violence and conflicts, the themes most likely, according to the respondents, to contribute to conflict prevention and resolution concern:

- Promotion of fair access to resources, services and opportunities and of governance.
- Improvement in the living conditions of communities and internally displaced persons,
- Strengthening of social cohesion
- Establishment of fair justice,
- Better management of natural resources and land disputes
- Implementation of initiatives to combat discrimination, exclusion and all factors that fuel insecurity.

In the context of the SHIFT and RECOLG projects, the recommendations put forward aimed, among other things, **to capitalize on emerging sectors for economic development**, implementing income-generating activities to alleviate specific divisive factors, and formulating a holistic strategy focused on raising awareness, **facilitating dialogue, and advocating for these issues**. The aim was also to encourage **popularization of texts** and development of **specific training on land management**. Lastly, in light of the connectors identified, the proposals also bore on the promotion of peaceful coexistence, resource-sharing and the development of collaborative initiatives considered to foster interaction and social cohesion, in the same way as the establishment of shared infrastructure.

▶ Identify the relevant actors and institutions to be involved in the interventions

The analysis of factors that contribute to social cohesion and to peacebuilding cannot be separated from the actors involved in this regard. When identifying sources of resilience to conflicts, it is also important to identify the actors and mechanisms which participate in resolving conflict tensions and to assess those with which it might potentially be worth collaborating and/or renewing collaboration.

Example of identification of actors

Tension mitigation and conflict resolution are often the result of combined actions involving several actors. In Dori, the perceived reduction in violence associated with the agropastoral system can partly be explained by a relative effectiveness of the local conflict management mechanisms[10], which are the Village Land Commissions (CFVs), Village Land Conciliation Commissions (CCFVs), Rural Land Services (SFRs) and State Offices (BDs), all present in the municipality of Dori, and whose capacities are continually strengthened by the NGOs, which also lend support in terms of awareness-raising, dialogue about resource-sharing and land regulations. Village Development Committees act as a bridge at village level, with the organization of Committees for Peace.

The recommendations outlined in terms of the risks and cohesive opportunities identified were used to adapt the programming. An organization is considered conflict-sensitive only if, in practice, the three-step conflict analysis process is effective with consideration of the risks and opportunities in the project cycle.

10. As prescribed in Act No.034-2009/AN of 16 June 2009 on the land system.

FINDINGS

Conflict sensitivity, particularly crucial in fragile contexts, requires a comprehensive strategy for effective implementation. While it may appear straightforward initially, its definition remains intricate. As observed, there are multiple prerequisites linked to operationalizing conflict analyses.

The application of a **conflict-sensitive approach** involves:

▶ **Understanding the context** – to gain a thorough understanding of the dynamics of peace and conflicts in the project's areas of operation (at the very least).
▶ **Using conflict analysis** – to determine what will be monitored and assessed during the project's life cycle and how this will be done
▶ **Using the findings of the conflict analysis** – to adapt the field approach of an ongoing project as necessary or to inform the design of a new project

! **Conflict analysis is the first step towards becoming conflict-sensitive.**

It is therefore important to budget and plan for the conflict analysis-related activities. For instance, these activities may include:

● Data collection (Interviews with key informants, focus groups, etc.)
● Periodic review workshops to update the conflict analysis
● Training and capacity-building sessions for staff and partners

Conflict sensitivity entails:

▶ **The involvement of various actors:** Technical experts from different sectors (e.g. Humanitarian Disarmament & Peacebuilding, Economic Recovery, Protection, Safety-Access, Accountability or Support).
▶ **Monitoring and updating continuously** via, for example, the implementation of local, multi-actor mechanisms like the internal analysis committees.

Conflict sensitivity also calls for:

▶ **The existence of specific and strategic frameworks** for capitalizing on and embedding conflict sensitivity.
▶ **The establishment of strategic brainstorming and decision-making sessions** on the question for a holistic consideration across all programmes and sectors.
▶ **More active promotion of the collaborative framework with the safety access officers** for more in-depth consideration of access-related challenges

To sum up, to ensure **conflict-sensitive programming**, it will be necessary to:

▶ **Prioritize** conflict sensitivity in strategic, financial and operational terms

▶ **Guarantee** that conflict sensitivity is an overarching consideration during all the key stages of assessment, dissemination of results and adaptation of the programming

▶ **Promote** the provision of human resources dedicated to conflict sensitivity

OPERATIONALIZING CONFLICT SENSITIVITY
IN COMPLEX CONTEXTS:
LESSONS FROM LIPTAKO-GOURMA

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Founded in 1956, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is the largest international NGO in Denmark, with specific expertise in forced displacement. DRC has 9,000 staff members working across 40 countries. DRC advocates for the rights and solutions for communities affected by displacement, and provides assistance at every stage of displacement situations: during major crises, during displacement, in exile, when settling and integrating in new locations, or upon return. DRC helps displaced people to become self-reliant and integrated into host societies. DRC works with civil society and the responsible authorities to promote the protection of rights and inclusion.

DRC's code of conduct is at the heart of our organizational mission, and DRC strives for the highest ethical and professional standards. DRC has been certified as meeting the highest quality standards under the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability.

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Operationalizing conflict
sensitivity in complex contexts:
**Lessons from Liptako-
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