

IPLAC CONFLICT ANALYSIS GUIDE

2007



Conflict analysis can be understood as the “systematic study of the profile, causes, actors, and dynamics of conflict”. (IDRC 2004)

1. Conflict analysis is an important tool in the process of exploring and developing program initiatives. The purpose of this document is to provide IPLAC staff and consultants with a basic understanding of conflict analysis and an initial standardized format for developing a conflict analysis.
2. The objectives of the document are:
 - To provide an introduction to conflict analysis.
 - To provide a simple format based on key questions (to be used to develop a template).
3. As part of the strategic planning process conducted in 2007, IPLAC has produced two methodological guides – this Conflict Analysis Guide and the Guide for New Initiative Design Process. Together, these documents provide methodological guidance for the program exploration and development phases of IPLAC’s work.
4. The design of a Participatory Urban Appraisal process is proposed for 2008. This design will guide participatory applied research on the sources of citizen insecurity in major cities in the region where IPLAC is proposing to support social change initiatives. The design of this additional methodological tool is expected to draw on the material in the Conflict Analysis Guide.
5. The Conflict Analysis Guide has two primary levels of use. Firstly, the guide can be used for phase 1 conflict analyses implemented by *outsider*¹ organizations. Secondly, it can be used for phase 2 participatory conflict analyses involving local stakeholders in a collective analytical process.
6. The Conflict Analysis Guide draws on the work of CDA (2006), IDRC, et al (2004) and Pruitt and Thomas (2007). It is divided into two sections:
 - Section I: An Introduction to Conflict Analysis
 - Section II: Conflict Analysis FormatAppendix 1 provides examples of conflict maps developed by CDA (2006).

¹ *Outsiders* are choosing to become involved in a conflict. Foreigners, members of the diaspora, and co-nationals from areas of a country not directly affected by violence are all seen as outsiders. Those working with foreign agencies or local people working in the manner of an outside organization can also be seen as outsiders.

Section I: An Introduction to Conflict Analysis

End Use

7. In recent years, a variety of approaches to conflict analysis has been developed by different organizations. Designing a conflict analysis needs to be done with the end use in mind. An academic analysis of a particular conflict, for example, may require a vast amount of information.
8. In the case of a conflict analysis being conducted to provide information for designing and implementing specific interventions in a particular conflict, more information is not always better. In general terms, the more tailored the tool to the specifics of the objective, the more useful the information generated.

Whose Analysis is it Anyway?

9. The answer to this question depends on the conditions under which the analysis is being conducted and its timing in the process. A conflict analysis can be done by a staff member, consultant or a group of people from *outsider* organizations. This will be referred to as a phase one conflict analysis.
10. A phase one conflict analysis is usually necessary in order to understand:
 - How to frame a phase two conflict analysis process;
 - Who to involve in the process.
11. A conflict analysis can also be a collective process that has been convened by AFSC, either alone or with other partners, involving local actors. This will be referred to as a phase two conflict analysis.
12. A collective process which brings together people who are not 'like-minded, nor 'like-situated' in the conflict system has the potential to result in a much richer analysis. It also brings to the surface other challenges associated with issues of prudence and security in politically sensitive environments.
13. Ideally, a conflict analysis being conducted as part of the process of program design would be constructed collectively by a broad range of local actors representing different perspectives in a workshop setting. Participatory conflict analysis can be very powerful in that defining the conflict is the first step in addressing it.
14. When it is not possible to facilitate a collective analysis, it is highly recommended that there be a process of extensive consultation involving government, NGOs (local and international) and local grassroots organizations, business, academics, major funders, etc. The consultation should ensure not only sectorally diversified input but also input from a variety of perspectives within these sectors. An appendix listing all individuals consulted (including organizational identification) adds credibility to the analysis.
15. While all conflict analyses are really a set of hypotheses that need to be constantly tested against reality, this is particularly true when the analysis is done by one individual or an internal team. It is important to recognize it for what it is, and to be clear about its limitations.

16. No matter who decides what to include and not include in the final analysis, getting the broadest perspective possible is essential. Minimally, the analysis should include the perspectives of all of the major sectors or groups involved in the conflict. When broad input into the process is lacking, the validity of the conflict analysis is questionable.

Benefits of a Collective Analysis

17. When the analysis is done collectively by a cross-section of people representative (but not necessarily representing) all of the key sectors or groups involved in the conflict, it facilitates a shared understanding of the conflict and increases the potential to coordinate action to transform the conflict.
18. When the analysis is done jointly by various organizations interested in exploring a joint intervention in the conflict, it can help create a solid foundation for partnership.

Levels

19. Actors and conflict dynamics may vary significantly at local, national and regional levels. Selecting the unit or level of analysis is a first major decision. The unit of analysis should correspond to the levels of the potential intervention.
20. Although the focus of the conflict analysis exercise is on a particular level, it is also important to understand the systematic linkages with other inter-related levels of conflict dynamics.

What the Conflict is *Not* About

21. "It is important to identify those areas where competing groups do agree, share common understandings, continue to interact productively, or mutually recognize a common interest. Examples include ongoing trade/commercial relations, common infrastructure, and shared religious or ethnic background. Peacebuilding programs must reinforce, support and build on these kinds of elements." (CDA 2006)
22. "Peace practitioners must also avoid the easy or popular assumptions about the nature of the conflict—because such suppositions may prove to be wrong. For instance, government leaders and the media might characterize a conflict as being rooted in religious differences—when, in fact, the conflict is more closely associated with economic factors. In such circumstances, programs that approach the issues as based on religion may miss the mark." (*Ibid.*:2006)

What Needs to be Stopped?

23. "Each situation of actual or potential violent conflict includes actions, situations, and dynamics that need to be stopped. Context analysis must clarify how the war system or injustice system should be interrupted—and who might resist such attempts. Must the trade in arms be stopped? Recruitment of young people? Exploitation of natural resources to support warring? Misuse of the media to target certain groups or distort facts? Funding from diaspora groups?" (CDA 2006)

Issues of Political Sensitivity and Security

24. Issues of power and access to/ownership of resources are often central to conflict. Conflict analyses by their very nature are politically sensitive. Those who have power and/or control resources often feel a strong vested interest in maintaining the status quo.
25. Conducting a conflict must be done cautiously and skillfully in order to minimize the potential for negative consequences for those involved. This is particularly true in situations of violent conflict where security concerns sometimes outweigh the importance of transparency.
26. There may be some questions that are not prudent to raise, particularly in a relatively public context. There may be some areas in which it is not safe to hold public meetings. There may be some areas that it is not safe for staff or other outsiders to visit.

Sources

27. The selection of sources of information will by and large determine the quality of the product. An analysis based on information from only one perspective on the conflict or that does not include important sectors will provide a limited understanding of the conflict. A lopsided view of the conflict may lead to conclusions concerning the intervention that are counter-productive at best and potentially dangerous.
28. Sources can be primary, secondary or a mixture. While an initial analysis based on secondary sources may be a good starting point in program exploration, information from primary sources is essential as the process moves forward.
29. Not all information is reliable. Triangulation is one approach for dealing with this challenge. A good rule of thumb is to verify every piece of key information with two corroborative or complementary sources. Information can be obtained through literature reviews, media coverage, expert interviews, opinion polls and other quantitative surveys, stakeholder consultations and feedback workshops where conclusions are presented and discussed.

Principles

30. Respect for the following principles will increase the potential for a constructive conflict analysis:
 - **Pay attention to the history/focus on the emerging future** – Understanding the historical context is fundamental but knowledge of the past alone should not be allowed to define the vision of the future.
 - **Gather all perspectives** - Gather information on all of the perspectives involved in the conflict.
 - **Involve all stakeholders throughout** - Where possible, involve major stakeholders in all phases of the process starting with discussions about the feasibility of conducting a conflict analysis up to and including an evaluation of the conclusions and the process itself.
 - **Consider the security and welfare of those involved**
 - **Be transparent** – Be as transparent with all of the stakeholders as the security situation will permit.
 - **Be rigorous** – Triangulate information.
 - **Less is more** – Avoid collecting mountains of extraneous data.

- **Be prepared to let go of old mental models** – Rather than trying to make the data fit into preconceived ideas about the conflict, allow the data to suggest new ways of understanding the conflict.

Key Questions

31. The conflict analysis format outlined in Section II provides a list of questions to be answered by those involved in the analysis. While all the questions referred to in section II are important, the ten questions listed below are considered particularly key when using a conflict analysis as the first phase of program exploration:
- What needs to be stopped?
 - What are the drivers of conflict? (dividers)
 - Who benefits from the conflict?
 - What is the conflict *not* about?
 - Who are the stakeholders, what are the connections between them, and what is the quality of those relationships? (connectors)
 - What is the potential role/contribution of the various stakeholders for building peace? (local capacities for peace)
 - What are the emergent political, economic and social issues?
 - What are the windows of opportunity?
 - How do the policies and actions of forces at other levels (local, national, regional) affect the conflict?
 - Who are potential partners, both local and international?

Skills and Experience Required

32. All staff involved in conducting conflict analyses should have good research, synthesis and writing skills, good awareness of conflict dynamics and sensitivity to security issues.
33. Any event that brings together the not 'like-minded' and the 'not like-situated' from within the conflict system should be designed and facilitated by an experienced conflict transformation practitioner and facilitator.
34. Those involved in drafting the conclusions of the analysis and in preparing the final conflict systems map should have a good understanding of the conflict.

Work in Progress

35. Formats of this kind are 'works in progress' and there will likely be suggestions for modification with each iteration of the analysis. There is real value in using a standardized format as it makes it easier to compare information across different experiences. Agreement to discuss any proposed modifications of the format within the team can help to ensure that this key tool reflects the best thinking of the team as a whole.

Section II: Conflict Analysis Format

As mentioned above, many organizations have done excellent work over recent years developing a variety of approaches to conflict analysis. The format outlined below is not an original piece of work. The questions under profile, causes and dynamics are taken from IDRC, et al.(2004) The section on actors is based on the work of Pruitt and Thomas (2007). The sections on international/regional dimensions, conflict systems mapping and local capacities for peace from the work of CDA (2006).

Instructions: Answers should be brief and in point form. Not only is the format a 'work in progress', so are the answers to the questions. It might be useful to think of a conflict analysis document as a work in progress to which information is added and analysis is further refined as the understanding of the situation deepens. This does not mean that the length of the document should keep increasing, but rather that the analysis should deepen and become more precise.

A. Unit of Analysis

- What level is the focus of the conflict analysis? (local, national, regional)
- Have other conflict analyses already been done at this level?

B. Conflict Profile

- What is the political, economic and socio-cultural context?
- What are the emergent political, economic and social issues?
- What conflict prone/affected areas can be situation within the context?
- What needs to be stopped?
- Is there a history of conflict?

C. Causes

In answering these questions, it is useful to consider economic, social and political (including governance related) issues.

- What are the structural causes of the conflict?
- What issues can be considered as proximate causes or drivers of conflict?
- Who benefits from the conflict?
- What triggers would contribute to the outbreak/further escalation of conflict?
- What new factors contribute to prolonging conflict dynamics?
- What factors can contribute to peace?

D. Actors or Stakeholders

It is important to do actor mapping (stakeholder analysis) in order to discern how the interests, positions, relationships between actors contribute to the dynamics of the conflict. The actors important to a conflict intervention "include institutions, interest groups, as well as individuals.

A thorough analysis deals with not only the major groups and institutions, but also the diversity that may exist within them – for example, within 'the church' or 'civil society' or the

'the government'." (Pruitt and Thomas 2007:61) This section is based on the stakeholder mapping section of *Democratic Dialogue: A Handbook for Practitioners* by Pruitt and Thomas.

- Who are the actors or stakeholders in the conflict?
- What are their interests, needs, goals and concerns?
- What is their perception of/position on key issues?
- What is their connection to others and the quality of those relationships? (connectors)
- What is their openness to/support to the idea of a multi-stakeholder approach?
- What power or means of influence do they have?
- What is their potential role/contribution? (local capacities for peace)

E. Dynamics

- What are the current conflict trends?
- What are the windows of opportunity?
- What scenarios can be developed from the analysis of the conflict profile, causes and actors?

F. International/Regional Dimensions of the Conflict

- How do the policies and actions of forces outside the immediate local context (village, province, nation) affect the conflict?
- How might such factors be addressed?
- What kinds of local-international cooperation are needed to handle these external issues?

G. Conflict Systems Map

"Fairly recently, scholars and practitioners have been working on treating *conflicts* as systems—in other words, seeing conflicts as a series of interrelated factors, each with its role in maintaining unhealthy interactions. One of the principles of systems dynamics asserts that a change in one part of the system will cause changes in other parts—although not always the change intended! ... (I)f conflicts conform to the same principles as other types of systems, we should be able to figure out how to induce positive change, by developing a systems understanding of the conflict, identifying key leverage points for change, and undertaking appropriate intervention strategies." (CDA 2006:34)

The purpose of the conflict system map is to show the inter-relationship between issues around which actors are, either in 'tension' (different real or perceived interests), or in open or overt conflict. A picture is worth a thousand words and a good conflict system map is a more efficient way to present the information than many pages of text. When there are lists of specific grievances related to a conflictive relationship (for example by general population in relationship to the government or other actors), they could be listed on one side of the systems map.

See Appendix 1 for an example of conflict system maps drawn from CDA's work (CDA 2006).

H. Local Capacities for Peace

- Do competing groups agree or share common understandings?
- Are there areas where they continue to act productively together?
- Do they recognize common interests?

I. Potential Entry Points

- What are the potential entry points for an intervention?
- What other organizations (local and international) are involved in work related to these potential entry points?
- Who are potential partners? (Please refer to CDA 2006:30 for principles of effective partnership)

Bibliography

Collaborative for Development Action, "Reflecting on Peace Practices Project", 2006. www.cdainc.org. Last consulted 15 February 2007.

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Appendix 1: Example of Conflict Systems Maps (CDA 2006:38)

