

# Conflict Assessment and Planning Synopsis

## Book Summary

This synopsis is a summary of a new book and is adapted from *Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning: A Strategic, Participatory, Systems-based Handbook on Human Security* published by Kumarian press, March 2013. In sum, the book includes:

- A simple conflict assessment framework that directly links to a planning framework
- Rigorous research methods to conduct assessment, monitoring and evaluation based on collecting data that is valid, accurate and triangulated
- Key components of strategic planning - including conflict assessment, self assessment, theories of change, monitoring and evaluation and design concepts and methods

## Why Conduct a Conflict Assessment?

Our analysis or understanding of conflict and violence shapes our response to it.

- Conflict assessment improves efforts to prevent and respond to violent conflict and mass atrocities by accurately identifying and prioritizing factors driving conflict and supporting peace. Conflict assessment can improve the effectiveness and sustainability of efforts.
- Conflict assessment reduces the chance for negative second and third order effects that are counterproductive to goals of peace and security.



Some planners quip that there was an approximate 90-10 ratio of action to analysis at the beginning of Iraq War. The surge reverse this to a 90-10 ratio of analysis to action. Many planners understand that “you have to go slow to go fast.” A rush to action often means well-intentioned action can have tremendous counterproductive effects.

**Overconfidence:** “Can do” attitudes and fear of “analysis paralysis” means people skimp on research for conflict assessment. A lack of humility to “know what we don’t know” can lead to policies and programs based on untested assumption and uniformed guessing.

**Untested Assumptions:** People tend to reinforce their preexisting views of conflict.

**Organizational Interests:** Existing organizational capacities too often shape conflict response programs instead of actual assessments of conflict drivers and mitigators.

## What does Conflict Assessment Include?

Conflict assessment is not the same thing as a needs assessment, context assessment or intelligence assessment. Conflict assessment is an interactive research process. It conceptually organizes factors driving conflict and supporting peace to enable more effective peace and security policies, programs and projects.

Governments, universities and NGOs around the world have developed a variety of similar conflict assessment frameworks. A synthesis of these frameworks boils down to these components. These six questions link directly to decisions relevant to planning.

**WHERE** is the conflict taking place? Are governance institutions functioning?

**WHO** is driving the conflict and who is supporting peace?

**WHY** are the key actors *motivated* to drive and mitigate conflict?

**WHAT** are the driving and mitigating factors?

**HOW** are key actors driving or mitigating conflict? With what *means*?

**WHEN** did the conflict escalate or deescalate in the past and what is the forecast for future windows of opportunity or vulnerability?

Many other conflict assessment frameworks focus solely on conflict without examining local capacity, resilience, or factors mitigating conflict and supporting peace. This approach maps existing capacities and conflict mitigators as well as conflict drivers.

**Factors Driving Conflict** includes a range of lenses to map stakeholders and their means, motivations, and core grievances, to map relationships between driving factors, and to identify issues arising from the local context and windows of vulnerability given the historic legacy of the conflict.

**Factors Mitigating Conflict** includes a range of lenses to map stakeholders supporting peace, to identify local traditions, values, and institutions supporting resiliency and social capital, and to assess possible windows of opportunity for peacebuilding.

## Who Should Participate in a Conflict Assessment Process?

Conflict assessment requires dialogue with diverse stakeholders from within the context as well as outsiders. There are often significant gaps between the assumptions outsiders have about what is driving conflict and the insights offered by insiders who live locally.

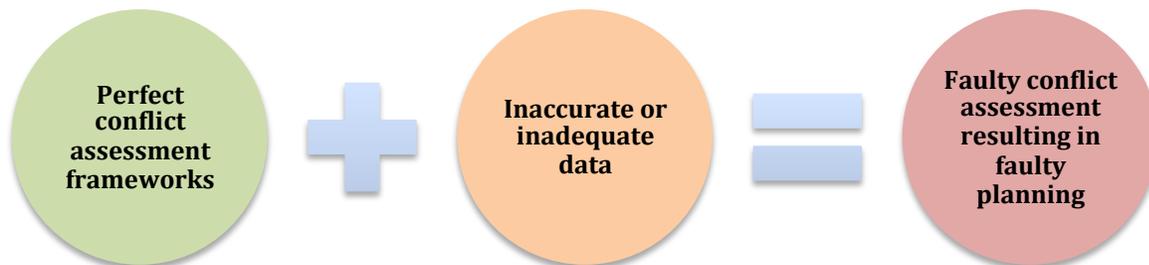
Too often, governments use rapid conflict assessment teams or red teaming, asking foreigners to “play” the role of insiders. These assessment teams are not adequate. In an effort to save time, organizations fill out a conflict assessment framework with their own best guesses. An individual or group will conduct a conflict assessment sitting at a desk, thousands of miles away from where the conflict is happening. Sometimes, organizations send in foreign teams who use local translators to interview a dozen or two government officials or elite civil society representatives. But this too leads to skewed analysis.

Without greater input by diverse local stakeholders, there is no way for assessment teams to guess the values and underlying worldview assumptions of a foreign culture or know how to map existing local capacity. Too often, conflict assessment teams are overconfident of their ability to understand local dynamics in a foreign country and lack understanding the inherent bias in any one person or group's perspectives. This results in inaccurate assessments based on untested assumptions that then lead to planning programs based on a faulty theory of change.

Instead, multi-stakeholder conflict assessment forums that include diverse sectors of civil society, business, media, government and outsider/foreigners provide an ongoing insight into shifting local dynamics and function as peacebuilding interventions that can positively impact the conflict. On the ground teams of insiders and outsiders can also work together to monitor local media, polling, conduct focus groups and interviews to produce rolling conflict assessment report for donor communities. Conflict assessment research should be participatory using trained researchers who can facilitate group discussions and focus groups.

## Data Quality is Critical

A good conflict assessment framework is not enough. Inaccurate or inadequate data put into a perfect framework will still result in a faulty conflict assessment. This wastes time and money on interventions that do not work.



This handbook includes guidance on the research process including how to:

**Gather data sources** that are accurate, reliable and triangulated. Data sources include books, reports, blogs, news articles, twitter feeds, polling, interviews, focus groups, observations and the interactive methods described in this handbook for use in multi-stakeholder workshops.

**Evaluate the quality of each data source.** Identify gaps in data or places where there is uncertain or contradictory data. Identify hypotheses for why data may be conflicting. Make a plan to gather further information. Researchers should ask:

- What information are we missing?
- Whose perspectives do we need to seek out?
- What research process could we use to discover this information?

## Turning Conflict Assessment into Planning

The handbook offers conceptual frameworks for synchronizing the conflict assessment framework discussed above and *outlined on page 6* of this synopsis with self-assessment, conflict assessment, theories of change, design, monitoring and evaluation to achieve better policy coherence and a comprehensive approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.



1. **Self assessment** is a process of identifying ones own cultural biases, perspectives, interests, and assumptions about a conflict, and then identifying ones own resources, capacities and networks to prioritize planning on what is possible and pragmatic. Self-assessment is an ongoing process throughout the entire cycle of assessment through evaluation. Conducting a self-assessment identifies your own cultural biases and perspectives on the conflict. The *Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning* handbook includes a set of self-assessment questions to examine the potential strengths and challenges of the group planning a peacebuilding effort. Questions include:

**WHERE** will you work?

**WHO** will you work with?

**WHY** will you do what you do?

**WHAT** will you do?

**HOW** will you shift power sources in support of peace?

**WHEN** is the best timing for your peacebuilding efforts?

2. **Theories of Change** or the “program rationale” elicits and identifies the perceived logic between the key factors driving conflict or supporting peace and what type of peacebuilding effort will build peace and prevent violence. How do people think change will come about? What are their stories, parables, metaphors and ideas? The *Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning* handbook identifies a broad range of theories of change in use by diverse stakeholders today. Ideally planners examine research related to these possible theories of change to evaluate their likely impact.
3. **Designing and Planning** is a process of identifying SMART goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. Planning includes deciding whom you will work with, what you will do, and where and when you will do it. The conflict assessment framework asks questions that directly link with the process of designing and planning peacebuilding efforts. The *Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning* handbook details how to develop strategies to move from micro to macro impacts by scaling up peacebuilding efforts in a variety of ways. It outlines a planning log frame to

lay out the goals, key audiences, activities, timeframes, outputs, outcomes and impacts of the peacebuilding effort.

- 4. Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E)** includes measuring short-term outputs and outcomes as well as long-term interrelated impacts of multiple actors, multiple programs and multi-sectors. Ideally, the indicators chosen for monitoring and evaluation link to the identified theories of change. Research methods collect data for these indicators based on expected outputs, outcomes, and impacts and levels of sustainability of the peacebuilding effort. Ultimately, a variety of peacebuilding efforts should synchronize and harmonize with each other to impact broader human security indicators.

## Key Definitions:

**Conflict Drivers** are people, institutions, or forces that increase divisions and threaten political, economic, security, justice and social factors related to human security. A conflict driver can be something like a famine, unemployment, easy access to weapons or religious extremism that motivates individuals or groups to engage in conflict. Conflict drivers tap into and mobilize grievances related to the **root causes** of conflict in existing political, economic, and social relations.

**Conflict Mitigators** are people, institutions, or forces that support political, economic, security, justice and social factors related to human security. These are also referred to as “**Local Capacities for Peace**” or with the concept of “**resilience.**” Resilience and the concepts of local capacity for peace refers to the capacity of a system to survive, adapt, absorb or respond to a crisis or severe change. An individual, community and institutional is resilient in as much as they can adapt, be agile, learn quickly and improvise new survival methods in a changed environment.

**Conflict Prevention** is an approach to peacebuilding that aims to prevent violence from starting by addressing key immediate and long-term factors driving conflict toward violence and mass atrocities. Operational prevention focuses on short-term crisis response including preventive diplomacy. Structural prevention focuses on long-term efforts to address root causes such as economic, social and political exclusion of some groups.

**Conflict Sensitivity** is an approach to programming and policymaking that recognizes the potential influence between conflict-affected context and a policy, program or project in that region. Conflict-sensitive policies, programs and projects aim to minimize unintentional negative impacts that may drive conflict and cause further social divisions while maximizing positive impacts on the context that mitigate conflict and bridge social divides. Conflict assessment and self-assessment research is a central to conflict sensitive policies, programs and projects in human rights, humanitarian assistance, development and related efforts.

## Summary Chart of Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning.

	Self-Assessment	Conflict Assessment Lenses	Theory of Change	Peacebuilding Planning
<b>WHERE</b>	How well do you understand the local context, language, cultures, religions, etc.? Where will you work?	Where is the conflict taking place - in what cultural, social, economic, justice, and political context or system?	If x parts of the context are at the root of conflict and division or provide a foundation of resilience and connection between people, what will influence these factors?	<b>How will the context interact with your efforts?</b> Given your self-assessment, identify your capacity to impact the elements of the context that drive conflict and your ability to foster institutional and cultural resilience.
<b>WHO</b>	Where are you in the stakeholder map? Where do you have social capital? To which key actors do you relate?	Who are the stakeholders – the people who have a stake or interest in the conflict?	If x individual or group is driving or mitigating conflict, then what action will incentivize them to change?	<b>Who will you work with?</b> Given your self-assessment, decide whom to work with to improve relationships between key stakeholders or support key actors who could play a peacebuilding role between key stakeholders.
<b>WHY</b>	How do stakeholders perceive your motivations?	Why are the stakeholders acting the way they do? What are their motivations?	If x group is motivated to drive or mitigate conflict, what will change or support their motivations?	<b>Why will you work?</b> Given your self-assessment of your motivations and how stakeholders perceive your motivations, identify how these align with the motivations of the key actors. What is your goal?
<b>WHAT</b>	What are you capable of doing to address the key drivers and mitigators of conflict?	What factors are driving or mitigating conflict?	If x power sources are driving and mitigating conflict, what actions will influence these factors?	<b>What will you do?</b> Given your self-assessment, identify which driving and mitigating factors you will address.
<b>HOW</b>	What are your resources, means, or sources of power? How will these shape your efforts?	How is conflict manifested? What are the stakeholders' means and sources of power?	If x power sources are driving conflict, what will influence these sources of power?	<b>How will you shift power sources in support of peace?</b> Given your self-assessment, identify and prioritize your capacities to reduce dividers and to increase local capacities for peace.
<b>WHEN</b>	Do you have an ability to respond quickly to windows of vulnerability or opportunity?	Are historical patterns or cycles of the conflict evident?	If x times are conducive to violence or peace, what will influence these times?	<b>When is the best timing for your peacebuilding efforts?</b> Given historical patterns, identify possible windows of opportunity or vulnerability and potential triggers and trends of future scenarios.