Conflict Sensitivity

UN Peace Fund for Nepal Strategies and Lessons Learned

A. STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

The UN Peace Fund for Nepal (UNPFN) recognized conflict sensitivity as one of the major cross cutting issues for the projects it funded. It made it mandatory for participating agencies to allocate resources and orient project teams on conflict sensitivity. The Fund-level conflict sensitivity mainstreaming attempts started prior to the 2012 funding round.

Conflict Sensitivity Strategies in Project Development

Strategy to Mainstream Conflict Sensitivity Approaches

This strategy was developed in November 2012. The objective was to ensure that conflict sensitivity would be mainstreamed much more effectively throughout the UNPFN, but also the UNCT more broadly. Conflict sensitivity approaches were thereafter adopted also for the UNDAF development and implementation, including national and regional level orientations and capacity-building exercised for UN and partners.

Project Proposal Guidelines

Requirements were built into the templates and guidelines of UNPFN concept notes and project documents for specific conflict sensitivity components including in project design, management, monitoring and evaluation. In addition to the actual conflict sensitivity activities projects are also asked to justify their selection of beneficiaries, geographical areas and implementing partners. As the first attempt of ensuring the sustainability, the projects are requested for proof of national ownership; and to spell out the exit strategy from the point of submitting the Concept Note. Additionally, the projects were required to include budget provisions for planned conflict sensitivity activities, including context analyses. Conflict sensitivity was also added as one of the project assessment criteria.

Capacity-development

Colleagues were guided to integrate conflict sensitivity into the project Results Frameworks and Work Plans through different clinics and one-on-one support available through the Conflict Sensitivity team. All project staff and implementing partners were also required to go attend the "Basic Operating Guidelines"[1] training.

Conflict Sensitivity Strategies at the Project Level

Context Analyses and a Do-No-Harm/Risk Analysis

All project were required to complete these in the first two quarters of implementation. Projects with the lifespan of more than 24 months and/or with a budget of more than one million USD were expected to renew their context analysis annually.

Guidelines for Conflict Sensitive Monitoring

These were developed as part of the Joint UNPFN/Nepal Peace Trust Fund/donor Field Monitoring Mission ToRs, particularly to ensure sensitive monitoring of vulnerable groups (such as conflict affected children and/or victims of sexual violence during the conflict). Project Mid-Term Assessment: The guidelines were flexible on how projects conducted their Mid-term Assessments. However, in the process, projects were requested to highlight efforts to increase and monitor conflict sensitivity, including ensuring project staff capacities for this, and to document related lessons learned, good practices and challenges.

[1] The BoGs are a set of agreed upon principles that guide the work of development organizations and implementing partners in-country, as it relates to accountability, transparency, impartiality and inclusiveness

Project Final Evaluation Guidance Note

Mirroring closely the Mid-Term Assessment guidelines, it also includes guidance on how to assess conflict sensitive project management and implementation.

B. LESSON LEARNED

These lessons are drawn from the seven projects funded by the UNPFN under the 2012 funding round. The mandatory context analysis, Do No Harm Analysis and mid-term assessment of the projects were reviewed as references of the experiences, successes and challenges faced by projects. This also incorporates lessons shared by the projects in a workshop in October 2014. Finally, individual interviews with project teams were conducted to validate the findings.

Prior to the 2012 funding round, the UN Peace Fund for Nepal (UNPFN) projects did not have explicit conflict sensitivity guidelines to follow. The assumption was that as they were peace-building projects they would de facto be sensitive to conflict issues. However, despite working in a complex peacebuilding environment, as a review of UNPFN independent project evaluations in 2014 found, few assessments were carried out regarding how UNPFN projects were being implemented, including whether they were conflict sensitive and doing no harm.

Many of the achievements on conflict sensitivity were facilitated by the inter-agency support of the Conflict Sensitivity team. This team was on stand-by to provide technical assistance, capacity development, including Conflict Analysis and Conflict Sensitivity Clinics, and review support, valuable particularly for many smaller agencies.

The general increase in perception that conflict sensitivity mainstreaming offers value-added and does increase the efficiency of project results, more stringent guidelines may need to be developed. The UNPFN maintained a level of flexibility at the level of the content and application of relevant guidelines, which led to some projects missing out on optimal added-value of conflict sensitivity mainstreaming.

Advocacy and Capacity-development

Training project staff on the basics of conflict sensitivity was not enough to motivate them to implement the mandatory context analysis and Do No Harm exercises. Consistent follow up was needed by the UNPFN Support Office to ensure that the conflict sensitivity activities were conducted, and that agencies understood and shared with each other the value-added of these activities. This led some projects to re-do their context analysis and DNH exercises, and other projects to complement existing work with district level exercises.

The mandatory budget allocation for conflict sensitivity was one of the major factors to ensure that the projects carried out activities to mainstream conflict sensitivity in their implementation. In addition, the mid-term health check exercise to review progress on project milestones was also useful to prompt projects to complete conflict sensitivity activities.

Capacity to identify linkages between all key cross-cutting issues, namely conflict sensitivity, gender, inclusion and M&E should be reinforced. Strategies to mainstreaming these elements should be looked at in a wholistic manner, including in designing relevant capacity-building interventions and availability of technical assistance for both UN agencies and their local implementing partners, who are often the project's interface with stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Ensuring Contextual Awareness and Relevance

When completed, the feedback from context analysis exercises was positive and there were many valuable insights that were provided.

Context analyses help in strengthening community-based approaches and are excellent tools to understand localised (potential and real) conflicts/disputes, power relations/structures etc. Context analysis exercises that give insight about the power/political dynamics between actors and potential localised conflicts/disputes help projects to identify at what level they want to target the social changes they wanted to achieve.

However, it was important that all project partners were oriented in conflict sensitivity basics before they were asked to participate in a context analysis exercises for them to be able to contribute meaningfully, appreciate the outcome and help them find project/programme alternatives. Context analysis exercise were a good opportunity for team building and bringing all stakeholders to "the same page" in understanding the project objectives, roles of individual partners and the context the projects are being implemented in.

For maximum effect, context analysis exercises (based on both locations and issues/relational dynamics of stakeholders) should precede the conceptualisation of the projects. Additional resources need to be made available to projects to complete these. One way to address this would be to promote joint Context Analyses by the UNCT and/or several participating UN agencies, to inform all projects' programming. In some cases, context analyses can be combined with a baseline and/or perception survey for maximum efficiency.

Communications and Managing Expectations
From a conflict sensitivity perspective, communications and transparent operations are essential. Projects need to be careful not to raise expectations.

In identifying implementing partners the projects need to develop clear, transparent and conflict sensitive selection guidelines and criteria especially if the project is multi-stakeholder and works in areas with big competition for available resources. The guidelines and criteria need to be communicated to those selected for a partnership but also to those who are not.

Managing expectations during context analysis exercises and prioritising discussions around the areas the project was mandated to address was crucial. Allowing participants to discuss any range of conflict issues during context analysis workshops and failing to provide programmatic answers to all of them produced negative responses. Carrying out context analysis with conflict victims was challenging for those projects which were targeting policy changes at the central level but without concrete services/support to

offer. The fatigues from being asked to talk about their problems many-a-times among the victims prevented them from fully supporting the projects.

Due to resource crunch and other capability issues at times targeting is the only option left for projects. This may create tensions in communities negatively affecting the very groups that projects are intending to support. Therefore, finding smart and creative ways not to create dissatisfaction among the untargeted but equally vulnerable and deserving groups becomes a must. Sometimes this means ensuring that project targeting is not too rigorous, and that there is a balance between including participants from the primary target group and other community members/stakeholders.

Sometimes additional resources need to be mobilized for a conflict sensitive approach in targeting certain communities without completely excluding others.

Projects that are expected to mainstream gender and social inclusion issues need to better reflect gender and social inclusion policies not only in modalities of implementing activities, but also in forming project teams and selecting implementing partners.

If the need is identified, make the effort to add and include, at any stage of project implementation, an implementing partner representing the excluded and highly vulnerable groups.

Contingency planning
Projects need to ensure risk mitigation strategies are in place especially for already known risks. For example, almost all the projects identified frequent transfer of government officials to be one of the risks for delay of timely progress of projects but none were prepared to tackle the situation; and many projects continued to be negatively affected.

A stricter timeline is also needed for projects to plan their exit strategy. Projects without an in-built handover and exit strategy struggled to ensure that the project was implemented in a conflict sensitive and do-no-harm manner. In essence, they had not ensured required referral or follow-up to their project

activities after the completion of the project in a timely manner. On the other hand, if contingency planning is done well, projects can multiply their efforts by making use of contextual opportunities that may arise for advocacy or for ensuring catalytic effect of their activities.

If planned properly, politically fluid moments such as elections can give projects the opportunity to raise important issues onto the political agenda for added discussion and prominence.