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Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning: Toward a Participatory Approach to Human Security

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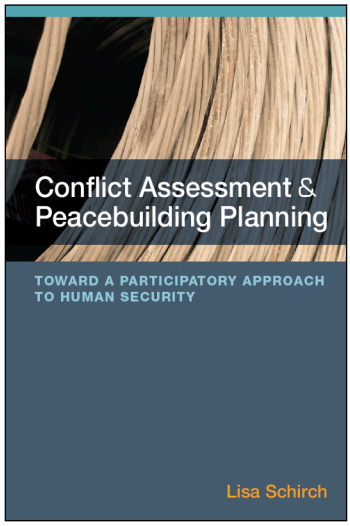

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The Purpose of This Handbook

This handbook aims to improve the effectiveness of peacebuilding by better linking conflict assessment to self-assessment, theories of change, and the design, monitoring, and evaluation of peacebuilding efforts at all levels, from community-based projects to international policies. These building blocks of effective peacebuilding elements form the architecture of this handbook illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Conflicts are complex, and assessment can be time-consuming, expensive, and even dangerous. This acronym-free approach aims to provide familiar and easy-to-use conceptual frameworks for seeing and learning about the complex, dynamic conflict system. Recognizing that many groups skimp on assessment, fearing analysis paralysis, this approach provides basic as well as advanced tools for each element of the process. The handbook tackles the problem of untested assumptions and lack of assessment leading to ineffective programs, as well as the problem of too much data and no easy, simple-to-use conceptual framework to turn data into knowledge that is useful for planning peacebuilding. Too often, critical steps in this sequence are missing, as different groups of people conduct the steps without coordination. This handbook addresses these problems.

Audiences

This handbook assists peacebuilding at all levels—from community-based projects to longer-term institutional programs to national and international policies. The level of analysis can be global, national, or local. Researchers can use the exercises in this handbook with groups at different educational

Figure 1.1 Components of Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning

levels, such as remote tribal groups, urban communities, and high-level policymakers. The handbook's intended audiences include all those individuals and groups from inside and outside of a conflict that are considering how to change the dynamics of conflict to foster peace:

- Local civil society organizations like religious groups, universities, or local community-based organizations
- International nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and their donors
- Government agencies working on stabilization, statebuilding, or development
- Regional and international organizations like the United Nations, World Bank, or African Union

Many of these different groups already have some sort of assessment process that feeds into their planning processes. But their terminology, approach to planning, organizational cultures, and missions are diverse. Their assumptions about what works and how change happens are also different. This handbook draws on current language and concepts from many of these groups at the same time as they are intended audiences. The handbook aims to help foster more coherent terminology and foundational concepts linking academic sources and practitioner tools in order to enable more effective communication and coordination.

While many insiders and outsiders consider how to best intervene in conflict, the methods in this handbook may lead a group to decide it should

not intervene at all. Sometimes the best approach is *not* to get involved. The methods in this handbook offer groups a method for making informed decisions about what they do or opt not to do.

Building Blocks of Effective Peacebuilding

The handbook offers conceptual frameworks for synchronizing 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. Table 1.1 provides a summary of the conflict assessment and peacebuilding planning conceptual framework used through this handbook.

Self-assessment exercises help narrow priorities and assess abilities of those planning peacebuilding. Conducting a self-assessment identifies your own cultural biases and perspectives on the conflict. From the very start, all individuals or groups should recognize that they are not neutral or objective, but that they bring a certain perspective and their own interests that may or may not overlap with the interests of other people in the conflict-affected context. Self-assessment is an ongoing process, required before beginning conflict assessment and again before designing peacebuilding efforts. It includes a set of questions to examine the potential strengths and challenges of the group planning peacebuilding, taking into account a group's identity, social capital, and financial and skill capacities.

A self-assessment should first decide whether your particular group is the best potential actor to conduct a peacebuilding effort. Groups should question their involvement, recognizing that interventions, especially those by outsiders, carry a risk of making conflicts escalate rather than de-escalate. Questions to ask yourself in a self-assessment 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?

Conflict assessment is a research process involving basic or advanced interactive exercises to map the factors driving conflict and the factors supporting peace. *Factors driving conflict* include a range of lenses to map

Table 1.1 Summary Chart of Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning

	Self-Assessment	Conflict Assessment Lenses	Theory of Change	Peacebuilding Planning
WHERE	How well do you understand the local context, languages, 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?	**How will the context interact with your efforts?** Given your self-assessment, identify your capacity to impact the elements of the context that drive conflict and support peace.
WHO	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?	**Who will you work with?** Given your self-assessment, decide who to work with to improve relationships between key stakeholders or support key actors who could play a peacebuilding role between key stakeholders.
WHY	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?	**Why will you work?** Given your self-assessment of your motivations and how stakeholders perceive your motivations, identify how these align with the motivations of the key actors.

(continues)

Table 1.1 Cont.

	Self-Assessment	Conflict Assessment Lenses	Theory of Change	Peacebuilding Planning
WHAT	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?	**What will you do?** Given your self-assessment, identify which driving and mitigating factors you will address.
HOW	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?	**How will you shift power sources in support of peace?** Given your self-assessment, identify and prioritize your capacities to reduce dividers and to increase local capacities for peace.
WHEN	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?	**When is the best timing for your peacebuilding efforts?** Given historical patterns, identify possible windows of opportunity or vulnerability and potential triggers and trends of future scenarios.

stakeholders and their means, motivations, and core grievances; to map issues and 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* include a range of lenses to map stakeholders supporting peace; to identify local traditions, values, and institutions supporting peace, resiliency, and social capital; and to assess possible windows of opportunity.

Each section of the conflict assessment using the Where, Who, Why, What, How, and When frameworks progresses from basic to more advanced expertise and exercises. Each section starts with basic conflict assessment methods useful for interpersonal, family, community, regional, and international conflicts to give a broad overview of the dynamics. A basic assessment is definitely better than nothing and may be enough to plan simple programs at the community level, particularly those integrating goals supporting reconciliation between divided groups into support for humanitarian and development projects. Advanced conflict assessment allows for more strategic high-level planning on how to address structural dynamics or how to design a national peace process. An assessment might start with the basic framework and then go deeper into the advanced analysis over time.

Where is the conflict taking place, in what context?
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, and what can be done to impact them?
How are key actors using power to drive or mitigate conflict?
When is the conflict most likely to be open to change for better or worse?

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.
- 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.
- Examine theories of change or the "program rationale," which articulates the perceived logic between the key factors driving conflict or

supporting peace and what type of peacebuilding efforts can address these drivers. How do local people think change will come about? What are their stories, parables, metaphors, and ideas? What existing research supports or questions these theories of change to help evaluate the likelihood of their impact?

- Design peacebuilding efforts by identifying SMART goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely on who you will work with, what you will do, and where and when you will do it. Planning requires developing strategies to move from micro to macro impacts by scaling up peacebuilding efforts in a variety of ways. Finally, develop a logical framework (also known as a "log frame") that lays out the goals, key audiences, activities, time frames, outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the peacebuilding effort.
- Conduct monitoring and evaluation (M&E), which includes measuring short-term outputs and outcomes as well as long-term interrelated impacts of multiple actors, multiple programs, and multisectors. Research develops indicators and benchmarks for monitoring and evaluating the effects of the peacebuilding effort and the validity of the theory of change. Ultimately, a variety of peacebuilding efforts should synchronize and harmonize with each other to impact broader human security indicators.

Defining Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding includes a wide range of efforts by diverse actors in government and civil society at the community, national, and international levels to address the immediate impacts and root causes of conflict before, during, and after violent conflict occurs. Peacebuilding supports human security—where people have freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from humiliation.

The term "peacebuilding" can have two broad meanings. Peacebuilding can refer to the *direct work* that intentionally focuses on addressing the factors driving and mitigating conflict. Peacebuilding can also refer to *efforts to coordinate* or set up channels for communication to develop a comprehensive, multileveled, multisectoral strategy, including development, humanitarian assistance, governance, security, justice, and other sectors that may not use the term "peacebuilding" to describe themselves.

Before conflict becomes violent, preventive peacebuilding efforts—such as diplomatic, economic development, social, educational, health, legal, and security sector reform programs—address potential sources of instability and

violence. This is also termed *conflict prevention*. Peacebuilding efforts aim to manage, mitigate, resolve, and transform central aspects of the conflict through official diplomacy as well as through civil society peace processes and informal dialogue, negotiation, and mediation. Peacebuilding addresses economic, social, and political root causes of violence and fosters reconciliation to prevent the return of instability and violence. Peacebuilding efforts aim to change beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors to transform the short- and long-term dynamics between individuals and groups toward a more stable, peaceful coexistence. Related terms and processes include conflict management, resolution, or transformation; stabilization; reconstruction; and statebuilding.

Peacebuilding is an approach to an entire set of interrelated efforts that support peace. People's efforts to foster economic development, security sector reform, and trauma healing support peacebuilding. But people working in these sectors may not want to call their work "peacebuilding." The concept is not one to impose on specific sectors. Rather, peacebuilding is an overarching concept useful for describing a range of interrelated efforts. But not all development or security programs automatically contribute to peacebuilding. Peacebuilding is distinct from traditional development and security efforts in a variety of ways. Peacebuilding's distinct characteristics include the following:

- Informed by a robust, participatory, ongoing conflict assessment
- Informed by conflict sensitivity that reduces the possibility of unintentional harms that could increase the risk of or actual violence or social divisions
- Designed to address drivers and mitigators of conflict
- Built on local capacities to manage and resolve conflict peacefully
- Driven by local ownership
- Informed by social dialogue to build consensus and trust
- Inclusive of all relevant stakeholders throughout programming and implementation

Note on Terminology

While the terms "conflict assessment" and "peacebuilding" are accepted widely, local sensitivities and even denial that a conflict exists may make it difficult to use these terms in some places. It may be necessary to carry out an implicit conflict assessment and implicit peacebuilding planning process that avoids the explicit use of words like "conflict" and "peacebuilding." Instead, groups can use related terms, such as "context assessment" and "development," even though these more general terms have their own different meanings.

Peacebuilding as a Process

Peacebuilding seeks to change individuals, relationships, cultural patterns, and structures away from harm and toward human security, as illustrated in Figure 1.2.[1]

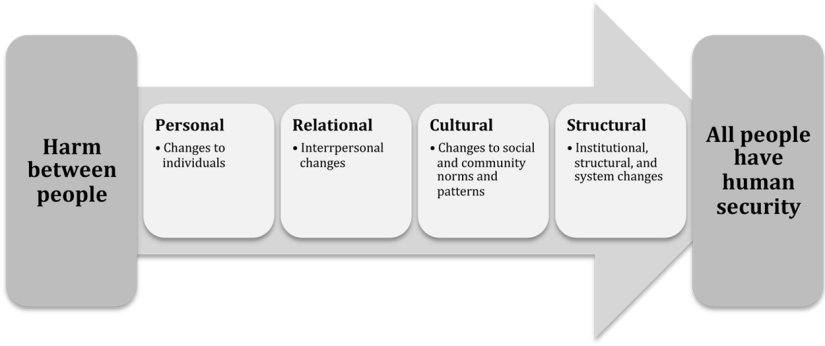
At the *personal level*, peacebuilding is about changing one's own beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors to monitor and manage one's own physical and emotional reactions to conflict. Peacebuilding requires learning the skills of being nonanxious in the face of conflict and being confident of one's own ability to improvise, facilitate, listen, and transform tense situations.

At the *relational level*, peacebuilding is about changing interpersonal relationships to increase understanding of the differences and commonalities that exist; changing attitudes to depolarize tensions and increase tolerance and acceptance, addressing trauma, grievances, crimes, and perceived injustices between people; and changing the patterns of interpersonal relationships.

At the *cultural level*, peacebuilding is about increasing knowledge of nonviolent ways of addressing conflict, depolarizing tensions and increasing tolerance and acceptance between groups, and changing the pattern of community relationships. This is sometimes referred to as creating a *culture of peace*.

At the *structural level*, peacebuilding is about increasing the knowledge of how and addressing the ways that structures, institutions, and systems impact levels of peace and conflict, changing attitudes about what structural change is possible, and fostering institutions focused on meeting human needs.

Figure 1.2 Dimensions of Conflict Transformation



Strategic Design of Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is strategic when it involves the following:

- Planning is deliberate and coordinated, based on conflict assessments.
- Planning includes a "whole of society" approach involving stakeholders from all levels of an institution, community, or society.
- Planning links short- and long-term efforts.
- Planning links different kinds and sectors of peacebuilding to foster personal, relational, cultural, and structural changes, and support human security.

Peacebuilding is *not* strategic when it is guided by funding availability alone, or when unsubstantiated guesswork and convenience guide planning. Aligning funding, organizational capacity, and access in order to carry out strategic peacebuilding may sometimes be impossible. However, the process outlined in this handbook at least helps move toward asking the right questions and making informed choices.

Peacebuilding and Human Security

Improving human security is the central task of peacebuilding. Human security can both complement and contrast with national security, as illustrated in Table 1.2. Human security requires freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity. Human security requires reducing interdependent global and local threats, insecurities, and vulnerabilities related to people's safety, development, and human rights. Peacebuilding strategies aim for sustainable solutions to address immediate and structural factors causing fear, want, and humiliation.

Human security requires a citizen-oriented state, an active civil society, and a robust private business sector, as illustrated in Figure 1.3 on page 12. An elite-oriented state working in support of private business sector without an active civil society results in corruption, instability, and a lack of human rights.

Human security is *people-centered*, focusing on the safety and protection of individuals, communities, and their global environment. When people are suffering direct violence, *protection of civilians* includes all efforts aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual and of the obligations of the authorities/arms bearers in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law. Humanitarian organizations work to prevent and mitigate human suffering to ensure people's access to impartial assistance—in proportion to need and without discrimination; protect people from physical and psychological harm arising from violence and coercion; and assist

Table 1.2 Comparing National Security and Human Security

	National Security Paradigm	Human Security Paradigm
Goal	Securing territorial, economic, and political interests of the nation, such as access to oil or other resources or promoting ideologies such as free-market capitalism	Protecting the well-being of individuals and communities so that they can live free from fear, free from want, and free to live in dignity
Actors	Primarily military	Multitrack efforts at top, mid-, and community levels, including government, civil society, business, academic, religious, media, and other actors
Analysis	Threat assessments primarily focus on terrorism, rogue states, and weapons of mass destruction	Threat assessments include weapons of mass destruction, terrorism from state and nonstate actors, poverty, economic disparity, discrimination between groups, deadly diseases, nuclear and biological materials, and environmental destruction and climate change
Budget	Security budget geared toward offensive military capacity	Security budget requires robust investments in preventive efforts involving economic development, good governance, and multitrack diplomacy
Global Ties	National security seen as relatively isolated from global security	Human security seen as interdependent across state lines

people to claim their rights, access available remedies and recover from the effects of abuse in ways that avoid exposing people to further harm.[2]

A human security approach empowers local people to assess vulnerabilities and threats and then identify and take part in strategies to build security rather than imposing outside definitions and strategies. Human security approaches ask, "Stabilization for whom and for what purpose?" Strategies to achieve human security are successful in as much as local people perceive these strategies as protecting their quantity and quality of life. Human security requires stability. But when governments serve elite interests at the exclusion of their citizens or when governments repress their own citizens, change may be necessary. Many states still use political repression and torture against their own citizens, restrict information via the media, and limit civil freedoms.

Most violence happens within states, not between states. A traditional emphasis on state sovereignty limited international action when a government used repression on its own people or was unable to protect its citizens during civil violence. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine

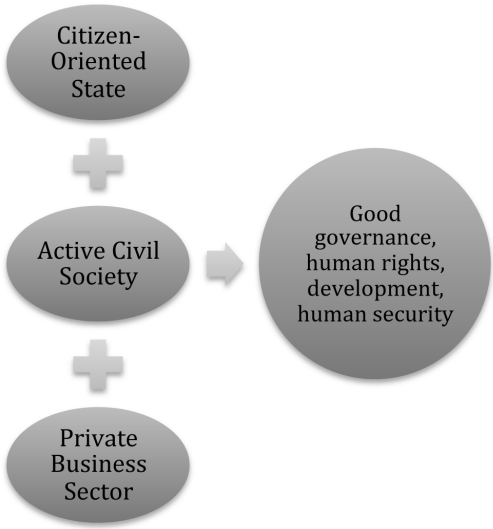


Figure 1.3 Three Elements of a State With Human Security

details each state's responsibility to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing (mass atrocities). If the state is unable to protect its population, the international community has a responsibility to help build state capacity for early-warning, mediating conflicts, security sector reform, and many other actions. If a state fails to protect its citizens from mass atrocities or commits these acts against its own citizens, the international community has the responsibility to intervene at first diplomatically using a wide array of peaceful measures, then more coercively through various forms of sanctions, and using force as a last resort.

Peacebuilding Activities

Peacebuilding processes help to build the conditions necessary for five key areas or end states of human security. Table 1.3 illustrates the key concepts of human security and offers examples of the kinds of peacebuilding programs supporting each area and desired end states.[3]

Problems and Principles of Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning

Too often, conflict assessment does not adequately inform peacebuilding planning. And if conflict assessment is undertaken, it relies on donor-driver outsiders using inadequate research methods that fail to appreciate

Table 1.3 Five Categories of Peacebuilding and Human Security

Levels of Change	Politically Stable Democracy	Sustainable Economy	Safe and Secure Environment	Justice and Rule of Law	Social and Cultural Well-Being
	Predictable and participatory decision making and governance	*Access to basic resources and conducive to socially responsible business*	*Personal safety and freedom of movement*	*Perceived equity in social relations and justice systems*	*Respect and dignity between people of different cultures and identities*
	Peacebuilding efforts include these activities in each category:				
Structural	Build formal and informal **governance** institutions Develop independent **media** Foster **civil society organizations** that advocate for public issues	Build **infrastructure** Promote just, sustainable economic policies within the **regulatory and legal environment** Address institutional obstacles to **economic equity**	Conduct **security sector reform** Create institutions to **restrain perpetrators** of violence Use **security forces** to enforce cease-fires, peace zones **Disarm and demobilize** armed groups **Prevent and mitigate natural disasters**	Foster legitimate and just **legal frameworks** Monitor **human rights** Build **independent courts** **Community policing** Create systems for **restorative and transitional justice**	Create **interreligious or interethnic task forces** on preventing violence Support cultural, religious, and media institutions that provide information on **intergroup relations**
Cultural	Use media programs, and religious and cultural venues to discuss **values of citizenship, political equality, and democracy**	Address culture of corruption **Sanction war profiteering** and illicit trade	**Foster respect** for human rights and humanitarian law **Promote understanding** of environmental sustainability	Use media programs, and religious and cultural venues to **promote respect for rule of law and human rights**	Use **media programs, rituals, the arts, and religious and cultural venues** to foster group relations, trauma healing, and peace
Relational	Create **multistakeholder governance processes** Use **mediation and negotiation** to reach political solutions Build state-society relations with **policy advocacy**	Develop processes for **community-based economic development**	Improve relations between security forces and communities **Reintegrate armed groups**	**Mobilize citizens** to advocate for fair and just laws and policies	Use media and the arts for **prejudice reduction** **Intergroup dialogues** Support **women's empowerment and gender sensitivity**
Personal	Train government and institutional leaders in **peacebuilding skills and processes**	Train citizens in starting and supporting **socially responsible businesses**	Train citizens to provide **security sector oversight** and participate in **community watch**		Use rituals, memorials for individual and group **trauma healing**

the complex, culturally unique, local conflict-affected system. Many existing conflict assessment methods and frameworks do not include explicit advice or processes for how to link assessment with planning. Research on whether conflict assessment led to better peacebuilding found no link, suggesting that even when groups conducted conflict assessment, they did not link it to their planning process.[4] This handbook seeks to make a more explicit connection between robust quality conflict assessment research and peacebuilding planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

A conflict assessment process ideally generates ideas that can aid in planning for what to do about a conflict. A conflict assessment can help identify who and what are important factors driving or mitigating conflict. Each of these drivers might lead to a different type of peacebuilding effort. For example,

- If unequal distribution of wealth is driving conflict, development efforts supporting marginalized populations or advocating for policies that provide equal economic opportunities may be an appropriate peacebuilding effort.
- If religious leaders are mitigating conflict, expanding interreligious education, reconciliation workshops, and dialogues may be an appropriate peacebuilding strategy.
- If military raids and house searches are driving conflict, security sector reform efforts and advocacy related to changing military strategies may be important peacebuilding efforts.
- If political power struggles by a repressive elite class are driving conflict between economic classes, a civil society movement supporting participatory democracy may be an important effort.
- If markets run by women in developing countries are mitigating conflict between ethnic groups, peacebuilding efforts that focus on increasing economic interdependence of groups and strengthening the voices of women may be important.

Without rigorous research into who and what are driving and mitigating conflict, planning reflects the biases and limited perceptions of the group doing the planning. Strategic peacebuilding requires a careful assessment of key driving and mitigating factors and then coordinating a range of efforts to address these factors. Peacebuilding also requires careful strategic decision making so that it leads to sustainable change. As detailed earlier, peacebuilding is strategic when it coordinates multiple actors, works at multiple levels in multiple sectors, and works at both short- and long-term change. This

approach asks a series of questions about the Where, Who, What, Why, How, and When of conflict so as to design more effective peacebuilding efforts.

Linking Insiders and Outsiders in Participatory, Asset-Based Processes

Conflict assessment and peacebuilding work best when they are locally owned and led or involve partnerships between insiders and outsiders. Outsiders, those people who do not live in the conflict-affected region and who choose to intervene in it, bring resources and expertise, but often only have hypotheses or guesses about insider perceptions on what is driving or mitigating conflict.[5] Peacebuilding driven by outsiders' perceptions, interests, and plans is unlikely to be effective. Conflict assessment and peacebuilding planning require opportunities for local people or "insiders" to provide leadership to their own strategies and to provide feedback to outsiders to ensure local accountability at every phase. Donors' priorities and perceptions of what to do about conflict too often trump or ignore local people's perceptions, resulting in local people seeing donor-driven programs as illegitimate, wasteful, and even neocolonial—reflecting a we-know-what's-best-for-you approach. Too often, planners sitting in foreign capitals conduct a conflict assessment based on their own cultural biases and untested assumptions that significantly depart from realities on the ground for local people experiencing conflict. Too often, foreign planners also impose unrealistic time frames and timelines for peacebuilding efforts. This handbook's focus on self-assessment, insider and outsider partnerships, and participatory processes helps address these problems.

Assets-Based Focus

Most conflict assessments focus only on local problems. This handbook includes a focus on existing local insider assets or resources for peace. It maps existing capacities and solutions as well as problems. When conflict becomes the main focus, people begin to believe their reality is unchangeable and fixed. This perception takes away their agency, power, and will to effect change. Some insiders view their plight as immutable and unchangeable. But in every context, there are local people—including key religious, ethnic, educational, media, and government leaders—who are already making the case against violence and supporting reconciliation through traditional rituals, use of the media, or facilitating social dialogue. A positive approach

to peacebuilding assumes that there is a local capacity for peacebuilding.[6] This assessment includes factors, institutions, relationships, traditions, key people, and other "assets" supporting peace.

Outsiders' Interests and Donor-Driven Box Checking

Outsiders' existing capacities, mandates, or self-interests and priorities often shape peacebuilding programs. Some conflict assessments are just a self-fulfilling prophecy for groups that come in looking for evidence that their branded peacebuilding method could work.[7] Outsider-driven solutions are rarely sustainable over the long term. Groups may simply hear what they want to hear in an assessment, or conduct an assessment merely to check a box rather than to truly design more effective peacebuilding. Too many conflict assessment processes rely on external teams that fly into conflict-affected contexts without knowing the language or culture, or the religious, political, economic, and social history. These "expert teams" may interview a handful of locals, but local civil society organizations criticize this research methodology, complaining that donors and outside groups "came to do an assessment already knowing what they wanted to do." Civil society organizations in many regions of the world report that governments see them as "implementers" of projects rather than as having insights into the roots of conflict or ideas for programming. The current approach results in duplication by different donors often asking the same local people to participate in their conflict assessments. This handbook puts local leadership and perspectives at the front end of all conflict assessment and peacebuilding planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

Local Ownership

This handbook highlights the *essential ownership and inclusion of local people*, a majority of whom should at least view peacebuilding as supporting their vision of peace, security, stability, and justice. Insiders are not just victims or implementers of someone else's peacebuilding plans. They are key actors contributing to conflict assessment and peacebuilding. Conflict assessment and peacebuilding planning that do not involve local people, or that only involve token local representatives, will significantly hamper the accuracy of the assessment and the effectiveness of peacebuilding. This handbook draws on diverse approaches to assessment and peacebuilding from around the world that researchers can adapt for local use.

Self-Assessment as Part of Planning

Many conflict assessment processes assume that outside conflict experts are coming in to assess and solve someone else's conflict as neutral outsiders.

This handbook emphasizes the importance of self-assessment for both insider and outsider groups planning peacebuilding. What social capital do they hold with key stakeholders in the conflict? And how does a planning group's skill sets and financial capacity shape their peacebuilding planning? How do diverse local stakeholders perceive the group or groups planning peacebuilding? What are the limits of what they can do based on local perceptions of their interests and intentions? What are the political, economic, and sociocultural interests of those conducting some form of peacebuilding effort? Do these interests overlap with or contradict local people's interests in human security?

A self-assessment helps a group planning peacebuilding focus on what it can and cannot do. Just because there is a need for a certain type of peacebuilding effort does not mean that any group can carry it out. The identity of the group planning peacebuilding impacts how local people view and support the group's efforts. In some places it is very difficult for local people to trust their government's peacebuilding efforts. Some governments may distrust NGO efforts. Some local people typically assume that a foreign government agency working in a conflict-affected context is working on behalf of elite political and economic interests. This presumption may make it difficult if not impossible for local people to trust that a foreign government has the best interest and human security of them in mind.

Required Capacities for Conducting a Conflict Assessment

Any group conducting a conflict assessment should have a variety of skills in their own organization or in the partnerships they form with other organizations. A few groups indeed have all of the skills. But most groups need more capacity in one or more areas. Insiders and outsiders tend to be stronger in different key capacities, which makes use of partnerships a frequent methodology for carrying out conflict assessments. Key skills for conflict assessment include

- Ability to build local networks and relationships to people who can help organize and participate in interviews, focus groups, and so on
- Knowledge of local languages and cultures
- Ability to travel to areas where research will take place
- Ability to design and carry out rigorous research methodologies
- Ability to synthesize data into knowledge and prioritize information
- Knowledge of grammar and writing sufficient to compose a formal paper summarizing assessment and peacebuilding plans
- Access to donors who can fund conflict assessment and peacebuilding efforts

- Access to policymakers to ensure they receive policy recommendations resulting from conflict assessments and peacebuilding processes

Insiders and outsiders should find ways of acknowledging the capacity of each organization. Outsiders may bring comparative experiences and capacities in project management as well as vertical social capital that allows them to conduct policy advocacy related to the conflict. In some cases, some outsiders may be seen as more impartial than insiders. Insiders are more likely to have long-term commitment to and trusting relationships with other local people, flexibility to travel throughout the region, language skills, and a better understanding of local cultures and religions as well as the region's political, social, and economic history.

Insiders Conducting a Self-Assessment

Every insider is also an outsider to others living in the region but belonging to a different identity group. People who live in a conflict-affected region or are part of the local context see and know many things about their context that foreign outsiders do not. But they also may be tied to only one part of the local context through their group identity, so they may need strategies for ensuring that truly diverse local perspectives are part of all elements of conflict assessment and peacebuilding planning, monitoring, and evaluation. In many countries, there are key civil society leaders whom outsiders rely on as their insider partners, but these leaders may or may not truly represent the wide diversity of civil society. Insiders can also be biased, and as a result they need to reach out intentionally to other insiders who are part of other identity groups, other regions, other languages, other age groups and so on. "Insiders" is thus a relative term.

Some insiders act as gatekeepers to their own contexts to decide who they let in as their partners to access relationships and knowledge of the local context and who they keep at a distance. Among insiders' interests are wanting to draw in outsiders who will support their side of the conflict; insiders can then gain from outsiders' financial and political power and influence. Insiders may compete with each other to gain influence with outsiders and to gain more power to be the gatekeepers in their context.[8]

Insiders can lead conflict assessments when they can play all or most of the roles in the list of capacities needed to conduct conflict assessments. Capacity building programs can support insiders' capacities in research methodologies, writing skills, and understanding foreign donors and governments enough to do effective communication and advocacy with them on conflict assessment recommendations for policy changes related to peacebuilding.[9]

Outsiders Conducting a Self-Assessment

Outsiders should always consider that there may be no role for them in peacebuilding and that their well-intentioned efforts may have negative impacts on local people. Most outsiders who come into a conflict-affected region lack understanding of the local cultural, political, religious, economic, and social context. They also may not trust insiders. Outsiders often come from countries that once held colonial policies that viewed local people as "subjects" or even as less than fully human. Many insiders grew up in countries under colonial control and hold vivid memories of blatant discrimination and racism. Ideally outsiders support insiders, and peacebuilding is locally led and locally owned. But in reality, research finds that in many recent peacebuilding efforts led by partnerships of outsiders and insiders, insiders feel that outsiders display a range of disrespectful behaviors, including[10]

- Imposing Western values and being insensitive to local cultures and religious values
- Showing arrogance and a we-know-what's-best-for-you attitude
- Showing ignorance of the complexity of the local context
- Humiliating insiders and denigrating their capacity and local traditions
- Not listening to their ideas upfront during assessment and proposal writing, but rather only wanting to consult after the fact to get approval or seek local partners as "implementers" of foreign-designed projects
- Failing to understand how their own countries' policies are driving conflict in the region
- Focusing on quick-fix solutions rather than the historical and systemic roots of conflict
- Lacking accountability to local people and just leaving if a crisis emerges

Insider-Outsider Partnerships

A "whole of society" approach recognizes that peacebuilding often requires insiders and outsiders—including international organizations, governments, international civil society, and local civil society—to work together. Human security emerges from a combination of a citizen-oriented state and civil society leaders who both complement and supplement the work of governments and hold governments accountable for their responsibilities and transparent governance.[11] Civil society organizations (CSOs) are groups

of citizens not in government who organize themselves on behalf of some public interest. Both international (outsider) and insider CSOs are independent from government, making their own plans for meeting human needs and improving the quality of life.

National Interests, Self-Interests, and Human Security

Peacebuilding is rarely seen as neutral. People in the midst of conflict are already in a suspicious and vulnerable position. They are likely to ask questions and make judgments quickly about groups from the inside or outside of their conflict that want to carry out peacebuilding in their community or country. Groups conducting peacebuilding may have any or all of the following interests:

- Supporting human rights and human security
- Pursuing narrow political and economic interests for their identity group
- Gaining funding to continue their organizational existence

In Sri Lanka, for example, countries funding and supporting peacebuilding had a wide range of interests, including regional security, with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebel movement seen as a terrorist organization; trade relations, including selling military hardware to the Sri Lankan government; prevention of refugees, which could destabilize regional countries; promoting human rights and respecting international humanitarian law; reducing poverty; and alleviating human suffering.[12]

Peacebuilding efforts should result in increased human security. Human security is people-centered, focusing on the respect for and safety of individuals, communities, and their global environment. A human security approach empowers local people to assess vulnerabilities and threats and then identify and take part in strategies to build security rather than imposing outside definitions and approaches.

In a conflict-affected context, governments design peacebuilding efforts as well as their economic and military policies with their own national interests in mind. Sometimes these efforts overlap with local people's human security; sometimes they do not. Local people are highly sensitive to outsider's self-interests. Throughout the last decades and centuries, many outsiders have come to their regions seeking to conquer territory, extract resources, or force locals to convert to religious and economic belief systems. Local people often ask, "Do they think we're stupid?" in response to outsider's efforts to hide or distract local publics about their national interests.[13] Rumors and

conspiracy theories spread quickly if a program or partnership is not transparent about its interests and intent. Outsiders would do well to put their self-interests up front and have an open conversation with locals about how and if these interests overlap with local perceptions of human security.

Democracy and Public Diplomacy

Local people often have little choice about whether outside donors and peacebuilding planners decide to come to their country. When insiders are left out of key assessment processes and policy decision-making, outsiders send a message that can undercut their public diplomacy efforts promoting democracy. Outsiders who design peacebuilding efforts but fail to include and respect diverse insiders send a clear message that the goal is not to support democracy. Democracy requires a diverse and active civil society, participating with governments when possible to assess conflict and carry out peacebuilding efforts.[14] Ultimately local people also have a right to be heard and to provide oversight and feedback to outsiders working in their home countries and communities.[15] Democracy is both a *means* and an *end*. Democratic policymaking recognizes that promoting democratic political systems requires exercising democratic processes and principles in all elements of outsider interventions in conflict-affected regions.

Contradictions Between Insiders' and Outsiders' Conflict Assessments

While many insiders (such as local civil society organizations) and outsiders (such as foreign governments) use similar conflict assessment frameworks and ask similar questions in focus groups and interviews, they seem to gather contradictory data and receive different answers in their research. Frequent contradictions occur in conflict assessments carried out by insiders and outsiders working in the same region. In many countries around the world, outsiders and insiders develop vastly different conclusions about what is driving and mitigating conflict. Local NGOs in many countries around the world complain that INGOs and foreign donors do not understand their local context.

In Afghanistan, donors—insiders and outsiders—all carried out conflict assessments using very similar conceptual frameworks, yet their results were quite different. Outside donors such as USAID found that unemployment was driving conflict, and thus devoted large sums of aid money to job creation projects.[16] Local think tanks found that government corruption and negative experiences with foreign troops in night raids and house searches were driving the insurgency.[17] The think tanks recommended addressing these drivers of conflict.[18]

In a number of east African countries, some donors pushed NGOs to conduct social dialogue programs between conflicting tribes. But local NGO and think-tank reports saw government corruption and the need for land reform as major drivers of conflict.[19] Local NGOs that had deep knowledge of the local context and clear ideas about what needed to be done to foster peace were largely left out of conflict assessment processes or were asked for their approval of the assessment after donors had already decided what they wanted to do. Foreign donor governments that had sent conflict assessment teams into the country to identify and prioritize aid budgets were reluctant to listen to local NGOs since they had already gone through a long process of developing policy goals, getting budget lines approved, and sending out request for proposals. The disparity between local and foreign conflict assessments meant that relationships between donors and implementers suffered, preventing coordinated action.[20]

In response to this widespread gap in understanding between outsiders and insiders, two large peacebuilding NGOs based in the United Kingdom, SaferWorld and Conciliation Resources, published conflict assessment reports called *People's Peacemaking Perspectives*. These reports aim to help governments and policymakers understand how local people see their own conflict and what they recommend international donors can do to support more strategic approaches to peacebuilding.[21]

Using Systems-Based Approaches to Multistakeholder, Multisector Coordination

An interdisciplinary group of theorists in the mid-1900s developed a new theoretical framework variously called systems theory, cybernetics, complexity theory, or synergetics. According to this framework, everything exists in an ecological relationship,[22] like the relationship between different parts of the biological environment, the parts of a computer, or organs in the human body. A systems-based approach is a meta-theory, or overarching framework for analysis. Systems theory is holistic in that it focuses on the whole, rather than on parts. Systems theorists believe that a part of a system can only be understood by examining its relationship to other parts. A systems-based approach to conflict assessment and peacebuilding grew out of the study of complex systems.[23]

This handbook takes a systems-based approach to assessing conflict, seeing the importance of understanding the whole system rather than just discrete elements of a conflict. This approach to conflict assessment and

peacebuilding planning recognizes and respects complexity. A systems-based approach to conflict-affected contexts looks at interrelationships between humans, the institutions they create, social patterns of relationships, and their environment.

Ongoing Assessment in Complex, Dynamic System

Conflicts are systems with interrelated, dynamic parts. Systems are processes, always changing and adapting to change. A systems-based approach reminds researchers that conflicts change day to day as events happen. A onetime conflict assessment is not enough to inform effective strategic peacebuilding. A onetime peacebuilding project cannot bring permanent peace. This handbook sees learning and research on the conflict-affected system and peacebuilding planning as ongoing.

No one part of the system is in control of other parts. Each part of the system influences other parts. Mainstream media and political leaders often provide simple "cause-effect" analyses of conflicts that sound like this: "Bad guys cause conflict. Good guys use military force to kill the bad guys." Often the cause of conflict is seen as some group of people, and the analysis doesn't require understanding complex local cultural contexts. A systems-based approach moves away from a blame orientation in conflict that isolates specific leaders (bin Laden, for example) or groups (al-Qaeda).

In reality, most conflicts have multiple causes that interact with each other, driving a cycle of dynamic causes and effects. A systems-based approach recognizes that a simple identification and removal of an "enemy" is unlikely to change the dynamics of a conflict if underlying driving factors still remain. Rather, a systems-based approach to conflict looks at the entire system of causes and effects and the interplay between groups.

Conflict assessment requires "seeing" as much as possible of the complex social system where conflict takes place. Factors such as inequality, easy access to weapons, shortage of water, extremist leaders, and repressive governments influence each other. Terrorist organizations and repressive governments are often only understandable in relationship to their shared context. A systems-based approach can help provide a view of all the critical elements that perpetuate or drive conflict.

Macro-Level System Impacts

Conflicts happen within complex systems. Small peacebuilding efforts rarely add up to systemic change at the national or global level. Too many conflict assessments capture micro-level conflicts between ethnic or religious groups without looking at global forces that fuel local conflicts, such as the

weapons trade, globalization, or climate change. System-based conflict assessments are useful in mapping both the micro and macro dynamics of conflict. Conflict assessment processes should map the system of conflict, all of its stakeholders, and its history, as well as how a conflict at the local level is nested within larger conflicts. Visual maps of the system help identify how parts of the system relate to one another. A systems approach appreciates, for example, why a community in Uganda may suffer from global economic patterns in resource extraction and the weapons trade. A systems-based approach to planning peacebuilding requires humility and strategy in order to have an impact on large, complex systems.

Using Assessment Lenses to See, Rather Than Tools to Take Apart

The metaphor of tools and toolboxes often describes elements of conflict assessment. The tool metaphor suggests that assessment requires taking conflict apart, as one uses a screwdriver to unhinge a locked box. This handbook uses the metaphor of a lens instead. A lens on a camera helps to capture an image or view. Photographers use different lenses to see and preserve different impressions of the world. A magnifying glass is a lens that allows an up-close look at certain elements of conflict while blurring others. In the same way, different assessment lenses help to provide different points of view on a conflict-affected system. The different lenses in this handbook highlight different elements of conflict. Conflict assessment processes contain many elements because each lens brings into focus a different part of reality—such as the social, psychological, economic, or political facets. Focusing on only one element can create a skewed or inadequate understanding of the conflict and leads to program silos and unintended second-order effects.

Drivers and Centers of Gravity: Prioritizing Data into Knowledge

Many conflict assessment tools produce long lists of factors or actors involved in a conflict without a way of prioritizing their importance. A systems approach to conflict assessment helps planners identify key drivers and centers of gravity. A *center of gravity* is a part of the system that has more influence over other parts. Influence can range from financial, moral, and physical power to an ability to act relatively freely, without severe sanctions or repercussions from other parts of the system. The center of gravity in many contexts is the information center. Military forces often destroy their opposition's news broadcast system, which they consider a center of gravity that would have significant impact on how local people respond to foreign forces.

Conflict assessment seeks to identify significant centers of gravity or key drivers or mitigators of conflict in a system that seem to have more influence over the system experiencing conflict. A center of gravity in a conflict system can be a part of the system that is vulnerable to collapse or crisis or has the potential for significant positive or negative influences, such as a mediation effort or an election.

A systems approach to conflict assessment helps filter and prioritize information by helping planners see the relationships and dynamics among key factors driving and mitigating conflict within a conflict-affected system. A good conflict assessment process filters and synthesizes a lot of data to prioritize key driving and mitigating factors in a conflict without sacrificing too much complexity and losing important insights. Planners can thus work with a manageable amount of information. Too much data or long lists of factors and root causes can simply create confusion and make planning more difficult. Information is most helpful when it can be categorized, synthesized, connected with other information, and sorted out by priorities for its relevance. This handbook on conflict assessment should help create knowledge and information out of long lists of unprioritized data.

Viewing the relationships and dynamics among factors allows planners to design integrated programming that reduces program costs and increases program effectiveness by building a broader set of objectives into each policy, program, or project. For example, a microcredit financing program in Iraq included a precondition that loans would go to business plans made by multiethnic entrepreneurs, thus incentivizing people to work together across the lines of conflict while also achieving an economic development goal. This approach is different than creating programs from long lists of factors that are not mapped to show how they relate to each other.

An important caveat is that one's own behavior, choices, or policies can be and often are key drivers and centers of gravity in a conflict. Another key lesson from studying how systems work is that each part of a system has the most influence over its own behavior. The easiest way to shift a system is to focus on those parts of the system closest to us. Too often, peacebuilding plans overlook self-assessment that identifies how one's own group is contributing to conflict and instead focuses on changing other groups.

Program Silos and Unintended Impacts; Second-Order Effects

If planners do not understand complex system dynamics, well-intentioned programs may have unintended impacts or second-order effects that fuel violence and divisions among groups. Consider two examples. First, an economic development program can bring in foreign investment to address

unemployment that is driving conflict. But this approach may have a second-order effect of increasing government corruption that rewards some groups and punishes others without understanding and monitoring institutional capacities for keeping track of these investments. Second, a program intending to foster reconciliation between tribes can bring together male tribal elders to identify development programs that they can work on across tribal lines. But a program that reinforces traditional patterns of authority and decision making may have the unintended second-order effect of undermining efforts to foster democratic decision making in situations in which women and younger people also have a voice in decisions that impact their lives.

These types of program silos offer solutions to problems driving conflict without understanding the broader context or thinking outside of their own sector. Some planners focus only on structural factors driving conflict. Others focus only on softer psychological, social, and cultural issues. This handbook emphasizes the need for coordination and complementary planning for strategic peacebuilding that addresses the wider system, including political, economic, social, justice, and security issues.

Multisectoral Integrated Program Planning

Peacebuilding requires coordinating programming by multiple actors in multiple sectors and multiple levels of society to address conflict drivers and support local capacities for peace. Integrated or multisectoral planning builds in an awareness of the systemic context. For example, a health education program integrates conflict transformation and women's empowerment goals by including women from divided ethnic groups in a program to build their capacity to provide health care in their communities. Integrative programs take into consideration a variety of other key factors, such as gender, trauma, justice, culture, and the environment.

- *Gender-sensitive peacebuilding* disaggregates data for men and women in conflict assessment processes, recognizes the relationship between violence against women and broader social divisions, looks at the impact of gender roles on the types of violence that women experience, includes women's empowerment strategies in peacebuilding, and identifies the types of peacebuilding efforts men and women can perform.
- *Trauma-sensitive peacebuilding* looks at the impact of psycho-social trauma on the worldviews and cognitive processes of people driving and mitigating conflict.

- *Justice-sensitive peacebuilding* looks at whether groups perceive institutions and social patterns as fair, reflect universal human rights laws and standards, and include victims, offenders, and their communities in justice processes aimed to foster accountability, restoration, and healing.
- *Environmentally-sensitive peacebuilding* looks at the impact of human activity that negatively impacts the environment and how these environmental changes then play key roles in driving or potentially mitigating conflict.
- *Culturally-sensitive peacebuilding* considers local cultural, communal, and religious values, beliefs, and social rituals as well as natural patterns of change already under way locally.

"Whole of Society" Shared Understanding Required for Coordination

Large conflicts require participation of the whole of society. Neither governments nor civil society can build peace alone. A multistakeholder approach is necessary. Ideally, diverse stakeholders listen to and learn from each other's perceptions in a conflict assessment process. A systems approach to peacebuilding requires coordination of efforts and the design of intentional spaces for diverse groups to share their insights. Lack of coordination or even communication among groups working in conflict-affected regions is a primary reason for duplicative, wasteful, and ineffective peacebuilding efforts. In many conflict-affected regions, government missions and civil society goals are different, making it impossible, or at least challenging, for coordinated action or a comprehensive approach. Goals are different because governments and civil society have different understandings of the problem, and they develop different if not contradictory goals. What governments refer to as a "unity of effort," or a "comprehensive approach" to a shared mission of peacebuilding, is not possible without unity of understanding in conflict assessment. Unity of understanding comes from sharing and discussing conflict assessment data and conclusions. Through this process, depicted in Figure 1.4, key stakeholders can build a shared understanding of the conflict or at least begin to understand where they disagree.

Several decades of successful and failed efforts to prevent violent conflict offer some important lessons for future planning. Every context is different, but countries including South Africa, Indonesia, and El Salvador are moving away from outright war, though they still face considerable challenges from human rights violations and economic inequities. In each of these countries, peacebuilding took place at multiple levels of society in some sort of

Figure 1.4 Components of a Comprehensive Approach

coherent approach that synchronized and harmonized some of the civil society, government, military, and international influences. Local Indigenous stakeholders sustained these peacebuilding efforts over many years and enjoyed solid support from international donors and advisors. This handbook offers a methodology that ideally could synchronize and coordinate or harmonize conflict assessment, design, monitoring, and evaluation processes.

Linking civil society and government approaches to peacebuilding brings challenges, however. First, often there is a lack of shared understanding or conflict assessment between governments and civil society, resulting in divergent approaches to peacebuilding and security. As a result, governments and civil society frequently oppose each other's efforts. Second, civil society organizations (CSOs) often feel that a comprehensive approach that requires integration with governments that call them "force multipliers" makes them soft targets for insurgent groups and hampers their ability to make independent program decisions based on long-term development needs rather than short-term political objectives. A comprehensive approach that respects "civil society space" or the independent roles of civil society is most likely to enable contributions to stability and security. Furthermore, in many regions of the world, global war-on-terror legislation restricts civil society freedoms and intimidates civil society peacebuilding, undermining civil society's ability to hold governments accountable to democratic standards, as some fragile governments label any dissent from civil society as aiding extremism or terrorism.[24]

Finally, many CSOs recognize the benefits of policy dialogue and "communication" with government and military personnel. Yet few consultation structures exist to engage with those CSOs willing to provide policy advice, share conflict assessments, or discuss overlapping human security goals.[25]

Need for a Coordinated Conflict Assessment Center

A coordinated conflict assessment center in each conflict-affected context would enable international and regional organizations, bilateral donors,

International NGOs, and local civil society groups conducting conflict assessments to share data and basic information about drivers and mitigators of conflict. It would also allow them to test and revise theories of change and monitor and evaluate peacebuilding efforts. Ideally, different international and local stakeholders that share a basic understanding of the context can better coordinate their goals so that they complement each other rather than contradict or overlap with each other. Humanitarian and military groups, for example, can benefit from a multistakeholder conflict assessment. A conflict assessment center could provide an impartial place with high-quality facilitation for multistakeholder information exchange. A conflict assessment center could also help protect humanitarian organizations' need to distance themselves from political and security stakeholders, since a wide belief exists that collaborating too closely or directly with them would impact the security and access of humanitarians who work with all sides of a conflict. This form of a comprehensive approach should be based on communication and shared understanding between groups rather than trying to integrate all planning and operational activities on the ground.

- **Assessment.** How are different donors or planners communicating and coordinating their assessments in a conflict-affected context?
- **Planning.** How are different donors or planners communicating and coordinating their planning efforts for a conflict-affected context? In particular, how are insiders and outsiders communicating?
- **Evaluation.** How are different donors or planners communicating and coordinating their planning, monitoring, and evaluation of their theories of change and their policies, programs, and projects?

Improving Research Quality to Save Money, Time, and Mistakes

Untested assumptions drive too many efforts aimed at supporting peace and human security, resulting in failed policies and strategies, ineffective programs and projects, and wasted time and money. Donors and planners often do not adequately invest in the research necessary to collect accurate, reliable, triangulated data—that is, data collected from three or more local sources. Conflict assessment is a research process that reveals new information about diverse stakeholders' perceptions. This new information can help people think nontraditionally to discover new options for transforming the conflict and building on local capacities or resilience that supports peace.

Even a perfect conflict assessment framework cannot result in a perfect conflict assessment without sufficient data quality. The quality of the research process for conducting conflict assessments is as important as the quality of the conceptual framework used to process data. If the people conducting a conflict assessment are not deeply knowledgeable about local languages, cultures, and complex political and economic dynamics, the reliability and accuracy of the assessment is highly questionable. Stated simply, if you put garbage data into a perfect index, you still get garbage out of the assessment. This handbook emphasizes the need for data quality to ensure valid, accurate, reliable, and triangulated conclusions about what is driving and mitigating conflict.

Overconfidence and Lack of Humility to "Know What We Don't Know"

Conflict assessments are too often simplistic, forgoing the work of understanding the complex context in which conflict takes place. Too often, groups design strategies, policies, programs, and projects without a rigorous assessment. People outside the context tend to drastically overestimate what they know, while people inside the context suffer from knowing only one side of the conflict.

Outside interveners first and foremost need humility to know what they do not know. Overconfidence in understanding complex dynamics in a conflict-affected context creates a chain of problems. For example, a quick assessment that unemployment is driving insurgent recruitment can lead to designing programs that may in fact have little to do with local people joining or supporting insurgents because of their frustration with government corruption or their anger at foreign troops in their country. It is better to understand how little we know about conflict from the outset, recognizing that a complex context requires ongoing learning and experimentation. This handbook emphasizes that learning must be ongoing since conflict assessments will only ever see part of the complexity and contexts are constantly changing.

Overcoming Inherent Bias Through Research Rigor

Most people hold opinions about what is causing a conflict that is impacting them personally. But these opinions usually reflect only one side of a conflict. A conflict assessment team may ask all the right questions, but if they are answering the questions themselves, their own biases and limited experiences shape what they hear and see. Two separate groups of people with different political, religious, and cultural affiliations asking the same questions will often come up with two contrary conclusions of what is driving or mitigating conflict.

Development specialists are more likely to see unequal development as driving conflict, while political scientists are more likely to see political power plays doing so. Military forces are more likely to see a military solution to the problem that involves the use of force against specific targets. Westerners may be more likely to perceive the local sources of conflict, while locals from the context may see foreigners as driving the conflict.

Can-Do Attitudes and Fear of Analysis Paralysis

A can-do, eager-to-get-to-work attitude leads people to want to spend less time patiently listening to local people and researching conflict dynamics and more time actually doing something to foster change. Many groups are reluctant to spend program time and resources on assessment research instead of investing funds in actual programming. This fear of "analysis paralysis" also impacts other fields. For example, at the beginning of the Iraq War, military experts reflect that there was a rough balance of 10% of time spent on assessment and 90% of time spent on action. As the years went on, that ratio reversed. Military personnel came to value sitting and drinking tea with village elders and listening to local Iraqi perspectives of what was happening.

All conflict assessment processes face time and resource constraints. But skimping on conflict assessment wastes time and resources. Analysis paralysis is less dangerous than action without assessment.

Data: Overloaded and Mired in Complexity

Analysis paralysis is an actual problem. People can spend too much time collecting information and causing confusion and paralysis by the level of complexity in a conflict assessment. Research shows that when people have too much information or too many choices, they tend to psychologically freeze up and be unable to make decisions.[26] Research finds that most business leaders suffer for lack of a way to make sense of the data they have, not necessarily for having too little data.[27] Groups may analyze a situation so much that the complexity becomes overwhelming, paralyzing them from taking any action. This handbook attempts to provide a conceptual framework for filtering, prioritizing, and making sense of data so as to enable more effective peacebuilding planning. This volume also approaches all peacebuilding efforts as research requiring a humility that balances a willingness to take risks and learn from failures.

Quality, Quantity, and Scale of Research: Saving Money, Time, and Mistakes

The quality and success of peacebuilding planning relate to the quality of conflict assessment. This handbook stresses the *process* of conflict assessment

and peacebuilding planning. The data collection and research process may be informal or formal, depending on the level of planning. An inadequate research process lacking quality data collection and community-level input is likely to result in inadequate or ineffective programs and policies. Groups hoping to do a quick and inexpensive conflict assessment may find the quality of the listening or research process more important than the quantity of time invested in it.

Given the strong critiques of wasteful and ineffective programs, quality is likely more important than quantity. The scale of the possible program or policy and the scale of the assessment process should be relative. Larger NGOs, governments, and international organizations may do nationwide conflict assessments involving hundreds of people to develop national peacebuilding plans and policies. Smaller organizations may carry out small-scale conflict assessments in specific communities to help in planning specific programs. This handbook allows for picking and choosing between different exercises according to the time frame and context of the assessment.

Conflict Sensitivity in Assessment: Unintended Impacts and Second-Order Effects

Intervening in a conflict creates opportunities to do harm, and to create unintended impacts and negative second-order effects as well as good at every step. Development researchers document wide-ranging examples of where good intentions of humanitarian aid, for example, have instead increased local conflict, provided resources for warlords to buy more guns, and created more local grievances.[28] Programs aimed at improving a community's quality of life too often inadvertently increase local conflict because outside resources end up in the hands of competing local factions instead of benefiting the whole community. Another scenario is security assistance programs offering weapons to an unstable government without first assessing the impact those same security forces have in repressing nonviolent expressions of conflict in the country, resulting in even greater levels of violence and instability. NGOs have inadvertently escalated conflict by bringing resources into a community to build a well, for example, while unaware of political divisions within the community that would benefit one group over another. Government planners have unknowingly fueled insurgencies when they used repressive security strategies like night raids and drone strikes that impacted the safety and dignity of ordinary citizens, who turned against their government and international allies for using these tactics against them.

New rigor and attention devoted to peacebuilding and statebuilding follow from international processes such as the Busan High-Level Forum

on Aid Effectiveness, the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, and the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS), in addition to significant reports such as the World Bank 2011 "World Development Report on Conflict, Security, and Development"[29] and the U.N. Secretary-General's peacebuilding reports.[30] These are part of a growing consensus that a peacebuilding approach is necessary for sustainable human development and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in conflict-affected states. This handbook builds on these common lessons learned and best practices.

All staff—including planners, financial officers, field staff, drivers, and security staff—should have a basic understanding of potential harms that can happen during a peacebuilding effort. Staff tasked with ensuring conflict sensitivity within organizations can review plans to catch a potentially harmful decision before its implementation. Organizations can take the Conflict Sensitivity Capacity Assessment (available at conflictsensitivity.org) to look at their institutional commitment, policies and strategies, human resources, learning and reflective practice, integration into the program cycle, and external relations. All staff should have basic competencies, including in the following areas:

- **Knowledge** of local cultures and the conflict-affected context and of the value of taking a conflict-sensitive approach to all programming.
- **Skills** to talk diplomatically and sensitively about a conflict so as to understand more of the interaction between the conflict and the peacebuilding effort.
- **Attitudes** that are self-aware of one's own biases, cultural differences, and local perceptions, and the **humility** to know that even though one's intentions are good, programs may have a negative impact on others.

Related Research and Assessments

Conflict assessment is related to, but not the same as, other forms of assessment. Conflict assessment is a distinct discipline and produces different types of information that enable peacebuilding efforts. Unlike needs assessments that focus on humanitarian criteria alone, conflict assessments ask a broader range of questions about what is driving and mitigating conflict. Unlike military assessments of "the enemy" that identify targets for violent action, conflict assessment processes aim to inform nonviolent, nonkinetic peacebuilding efforts. Like environmental assessments or gender audits, conflict assessment provides a set of lenses to look at a problem. But unlike any

of these other processes, conflict assessment asks a unique set of questions based on interdisciplinary conceptual frameworks from the fields of sociology, political science, economics, psychology, and other disciplines. Information from other assessment processes can be useful in providing data to triangulate with data gathered through group exercises or interviews in conflict assessments. Governments around the world are developing conflict assessment frameworks to complement their other needs-assessment and intelligence-gathering processes.

Research as a Peacebuilding Process

Research processes are not neutral. They are an intervention that changes conflict dynamics. While the final outcome of any conflict assessment will never be perfect, the discussion and learning that happen in the research process constitute a form of peacebuilding. It can produce better intergroup understanding and knowledge, which in turn can mean better group buy-in for peacebuilding planning and therefore more successful outcomes. Bringing diverse groups of people together to jointly discuss and analyze their context can improve relationships between groups. It can also generate ideas for peacebuilding efforts that groups can conduct themselves. Participants in conflict assessment research can and should become the designers and planners of peacebuilding in their own context.[31]

Conflict assessment is essentially the first stage of negotiation or mediation, when stakeholders meet together to share their points of view and discuss their conflicts to clarify issues and identify underlying interests. Peacebuilding groups can use research processes as part of any dialogue, negotiation, or mediation process. The conflict assessment process itself is often used as a form of peacebuilding between adversaries. Known as the Problem-Solving Workshop in peacebuilding literature and theory, academics invite key stakeholders representing opposing sides of a conflict to engage in conflict assessment exercises and dialogue.[32] Through analyzing their conflict together, adversaries can come to understand more about their opponents, identify key differences and common ground, and develop mutually satisfying solutions to key issues.

Notes

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13. Mark Bradbury, "Do They Think We're Stupid? Local Perceptions of US 'Hearts and Minds' Activities in Kenya," http://www.odihpn.org.

14. Aaron Chassy, "Civil Society and Development Effectiveness in Africa," in *Problems, Promises and Paradoxes of Aid: Africa's Experience*, ed. Muna Ndulo and Nicolas van de Walle (Athens: Ohio University Press and University of Cape Town Press, forthcoming).

15. Adapted from Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities Initiative, as cited in the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, "How to Guide to Conflict Sensitivity," Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, London, 2012, 28.

16. See, for example, USAID Afghanistan, Community Development Program (CDP) Fact Sheet, June 2011, http://afghanistan.usaid.gov.

17. In this situation, the two drivers of conflict found repeatedly by researchers outside of government were the two parts of the system over which outside governments had the most control. While foreign troops did aim to decrease the negative impacts of night raids and house searches, the communication strategies around these tactics either were inadequate, or the degree of change in the house searches—from less respectful involving dogs and body searches on women to more respectful of local culture and religion—the degree of perceived change in the behavior of foreign forces worsened over time, increasing antagonism against foreign forces. The presence of forces then became a primary driver of fence-sitters to support the insurgent groups. International policy in Afghanistan became a "wicked problem" in which the solution (military forces) to the identified problem (Taliban and other insurgent groups) actually reinforced the problem.

18. See, for example, Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder, "Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship Between Aid and Security in Afghanistan," Feinstein International Center at Tufts University, Medford, MA, January 2012.

19. Karuti Kanyinga, "The Legacy of the White Highlands: Land Rights, Ethnicity, and the Post-2007 Election Violence in Kenya," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 27, no. 3 (July 2009): 325–44.

20. Interviews by this author with peacebuilding NGOs in Kenya, Uganda, and those working in parts of Somalia between January 2002 and October 2011.

21. See the websites of Conciliation Resources (http://www.c-r.org/PPP) and SaferWorld (http://www.saferworld.org.uk/where/people-s-peacemaking-perspectives) for copies of 18 separate locally driven conflict assessments and policy recommendations. See also Hiscock and Dumasy, "From Conflict Analysis to Peacebuilding Impact."

22. Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996).

23. See Kenneth Boulding, *The World as a Total System* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1985); Louise Diamond and John McDonald, *Multi-Track Diplomacy: A Systems Guide and Analysis* (Grinnell: Iowa Peace Institute, 1991); John Paul Lederach and Scott Appleby, "Strategic Peacebuilding: An Overview," in *Strategies of Peace*, ed. Daniel Philpott and Gerard F. Powers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 19–44; Robert Ricigliano, *Making Peace Last* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Press, 2011).

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25. See Lisa Schirch, "Civil Society-Military Roadmap on Human Security," 3P Human Security, Washington, DC, 2011; Edwina Thompson, "Principled Pragmatism: NGO Engagement with Armed Actors," World Vision International, Monrovia, CA, 2008.

26. Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why Less Is More* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005). See also Dan Heath and Chip Heath, "Analysis of Paralysis," FastCompany.com, November 1, 2007.

27. K. Sutcliffe and K. Weber, "The High Cost of Accuracy," *Harvard Business Review* 81 (2003): 74–82.

28. Extensive research identifies the potential negative impacts of programs related to peacebuilding. See, for example, Mary Anderson's *Do No Harm: How Aid Supports Peace—or War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

29. World Bank. *2011 World Development Report on Conflict, Security, and Development*, World Bank, Washington, DC, April 2011.

30. Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict, United Nations, New York, June 11, 2009.

31. Hiscock and Dumasy, "From Conflict Analysis to Peacebuilding Impact," iii.

32. Christopher Mitchell and Michael Banks, *Handbook of Conflict Resolution: The Analytical Problem-Solving Approach* (London: Pinter, 1996).