

Food security & stability

A tool for conflict sensitivity in FNS programming

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This document is a tool for policymakers and practitioners in Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) programming. It provides a **method** to identify ways forward in fostering **conflict sensitive programming** tailored to the context you are working in.

It draws attention to key elements and concrete steps you can take to get to the heart of what conflict sensitive FNS programmes can achieve in **fragile settings**. What sets this document apart from other conflict sensitivity tools is the fact that it is explicitly informed by and adjusted to the **daily reality of (Dutch) embassies**. It helps identify how to integrate conflict sensitivity into the daily practice of FNS programmes and where they can or cannot contribute **to stability**.

Drawing on lessons learned from your colleagues in the field, this tool helps to **reflect** critically on existing practices and ask the **right questions** to ensure conflict sensitivity in (future) interventions.

Who is this tool for?

The present tool is meant for policymakers and other professionals working on FNS in areas at risk of instability and conflict. It provides a readable and easily applicable method that guides the integration of conflict sensitivity in the daily practice of FNS programming and helps identify where FNS programmes can contribute to stability. As the nature of conflict sensitivity in practice largely depends on the given context and those who work in it, this tool does not provide universally applicable solutions, but rather helps determine what approaches are appropriate in the area your FNS programme is or will be implemented.

What sets this document apart from other conflict sensitivity tools is the fact that it is explicitly informed by and adjusted to the practice and daily reality of (Dutch) embassies. Inputs from embassy staff working on FNS programmes have formed the key foundation for this tool. This means that while this tool is relevant for other types of programming as well, its content is tailored specifically to the realities (limits and possibilities) of FNS programming in fragile settings. This approach ensures that the present tool is, above all, useful and practical and steers clear of complex theory.

What is conflict sensitivity?

For this tool, we have taken USAID's definition of conflict sensitivity in food security programming as the point of departure (element 1-3) and added a fourth element to draw attention to the possibility of contributing to stability. Thus, conflict sensitivity refers to the ability of an organisation to:

1. Understand the **conflict dynamics** in the context in which it operates, particularly with respect to **intergroup relations**;
2. Understand the **interaction** between its **intervention** and the conflict **dynamics** in the context; and
3. Act upon this understanding in order to avoid negative and maximise positive **impacts**.
4. Make **deliberate efforts** to address drivers of conflict and contribute to **stability**.

In practice, conflict sensitivity is then translated into three programming strategies: 1) a focus on doing no harm (avoid negative impacts); 2) maximising positive effects on stability without changing primary objectives of programmes; and 3) deliberately designing objectives of programmes to impact on stability.

Why a tool for conflict sensitivity in FNS programming?

Improving food security can help enhance stability and it plays a key role in diminishing chances of conflict relapse in fragile contexts. Conversely, if FNS programmes fail to recognise and adapt to (changing) drivers of conflict, they can have negative impacts as well.

Impacts of FNS programmes on drivers of conflict or stability

Possible negative impacts: Targeting specific groups (social, ethnic, etc.) or geographic areas can reinforce or create grievances by exacerbating societal divides.

Possible positive impacts: Programmes provide households in fragile contexts with a (socio-economic) perspective, prevent negative coping strategies in the face of food insecurity, increase contact of groups across societal divides, and provide incentives for (conflict) stakeholders to support stability.

Bearing in mind these possibilities, this tool has been developed to assist policymakers and practitioners to actively work towards improved and sustained conflict sensitivity in the practice of FNS programming. Ultimately, being conflict sensitive will: 1) lead to more effective decision-making and programming; 2) allow for better risk management; and 3) ensure that FNS programmes are *doing no harm* and contribute to *doing good*.

How does this tool work?

This tool consists of:

- Four worksheets covering a different dimension of conflict sensitivity in practice – the ‘building blocks’ – with each including some background information, a number of recommendations for action as well as a short checklist.
- A detailed conflict sensitivity checklist to facilitate programme design, monitoring, adaptation and evaluation in the field. [Click here for a link to the detailed checklist.](#)

The 4 building blocks:

Taking stock & necessary conditions:

Setting the stage for conflict sensitive FNS programming

Implementation & flexibility:

Supporting implementing partners to maximise impact in fragile settings

Partnerships & complementarity:

Establishing synergies with other initiatives to contribute to stability

Targeting & objectives:

Assessing and maximising sustainable impacts for stability

The different building blocks are meant to inform and complement one another. As they are designed to be used individually as well, some aspects of the four building blocks will overlap. There is no necessary order in which they should be used. Depending on your goals and motivation for using this tool, your point of departure may vary.

This tool is the result of a study conducted by The Broker, supported by the Food & Business Knowledge Platform. It is informed by interviews conducted with experts and practitioners from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), several embassies and implementing partners.

Taking stock & necessary conditions:

Setting the stage for conflict sensitive FNS programming

*This first building block is an invitation for **self-reflection and 'taking stock'** – bringing to the surface existing conflict sensitive practices in your FNS programme – as well as identifying what still remains to be done to **meet the necessary conditions** for conflict sensitivity and possibly contribute to stability.*

Even though FNS programmes are not generally designed to build peace or ameliorate conflicts, when implemented in fragile contexts it is important that they take account of the drivers of conflict in the surrounding context. Conflict sensitive programming may result from formal policy and explicit objectives, but is also shaped in the day-to-day practice of policymakers and practitioners. Whether the goal is simply to 'do no harm' or to actively contribute to stability, some basic conditions must always be met to realise conflict sensitivity in FNS programming.

Key issues

- To ensure conflict sensitivity, your FNS programme must be built on a thorough **understanding of the drivers of conflict**, ideally informed by **thorough and regularly updated conflict analyses**.
- An indispensable condition for conflict sensitive programming includes a critical reflection on your own position, i.e. determining where your FNS programme is possibly less effective, biased or (running the risk of) adding to tensions, with the purpose of reinforcing positive and counteracting negative trends.
- Individual staff members in your organisation are the ones who are giving shape to conflict sensitivity in day-to-day practice, so it is important to have a clear awareness of the **role individual staff members** (can) play in terms of conflict sensitivity, which is strongly related to their level of experience and knowledge.
- Mapping existing conflict sensitive operations must begin with identifying **formal policies and objectives**, followed by an assessment of **conflict sensitive practices that are more implicit**, rooted in individual experiences, behaviour and actions.

What can you do?

- Make sure your FNS programme is informed by an understanding of local drivers of conflict. At the very minimum, you should have a clear idea of the factors that divide and connect (groups of) people. Ideally your FNS programme is informed by a robust and regularly updated conflict analysis. If this is not yet the case, explore options to acquire such an analysis.
- Identify limitations of your FNS programme in terms of conflict sensitivity and possible actions to ameliorate problems. For each action, determine precisely the required resources and changes.
- Identify who in your organisation has the experience and knowledge necessary to ensure the conflict sensitivity of your FNS programme. If such people are not (sufficiently) present within your organisation, think of external close contacts that can assist, for instance, at other embassies.
- Critically assess to what extent your FNS programme operates (or is designed to operate) in a conflict sensitive manner, both in terms of formal policy and in daily practice.
- Conduct a SWOT analysis based on the detailed conflict sensitivity checklist to identify possibilities for action.

Checklist	Yes	No
Your FNS intervention is informed by a regularly updated conflict analysis that adequately maps drivers of conflict and stability.		
Possible risks of adding to existing tensions and biases in your approach are identified.		
It is clear which people in your organisation are best equipped (in terms of knowledge and experience) to stimulate a conflict sensitive manner of working.		
There is a clear understanding in your organisation what conflict sensitivity means and how it can take form in a day-to-day practice.		

Implementation & flexibility:

Supporting implementing partners to maximise impact in fragile settings

Impact happens in the actual implementation of your FNS programme. This second building block draws attention to the importance of maintaining close relationships and effectively supporting implementing partners to maximise positive impact and contribute to stability.

In unstable or post-conflict contexts, circumstances can change quickly and dramatically, which may require you to change the course of your FNS programme. It may be difficult for parties 'higher up the chain' – such as the MFA and even at times the embassy – to stay fully informed about local dynamics and respond to them swiftly. Organising your FNS programme to maximum effect thus relies, in part, on the ability of implementing partners to stay up to date and meet changing demands as implementation of their initiative progresses.

Key Issues

- To ensure positive impact, contribute to stability and avoid negative impact, **FNS programmes must match the needs and demands of their given context**. Especially in rapidly changing volatile settings this may require regular or quick adjustments of activities.
- Rigidly sticking to predetermined approaches or outputs limits a programme's ability to adapt to changing circumstances or new insights. Therefore, the Theory of Change and design underpinning your FNS intervention should include **mechanisms of flexibility** that allow for the shifting of targets, outputs or outcomes as the context evolves.
- This flexibility must also be extended to **implementing partners** so as to enable them to adequately respond to changing needs and maximise their positive impact. Such flexibility requires **relationships of openness and trust**, which renders regular contact (where possible, including field visits) indispensable.
- To make sure the FNS interventions continue to be appropriate, regular monitoring for conflict sensitivity should be included in the programme.

What can you do?

- Plan field visits to implementation sites on a regular basis. If circumstances do not allow for such visits, make sure other opportunities for **direct communication** are in place.
- **Invite implementing partners to actively share their views** on the course of the FNS programme before and during implementation. Adopt an open stance towards their input and discuss what changes can be made and the necessary resources to do so.
- **Re-evaluate the Theory of Change** together with implementing partners. Make adjustments where necessary and repeat this process over the course of your project.
- Verifying whether positive impact is maximised and negative impact is avoided requires regular **monitoring and evaluation**. Implementing partners should be **assisted in carrying out M&E activities**, which warrants higher budgets allocated to such activities and may require different – e.g. indicator-free – approaches to evaluation.
- Conduct a SWOT analysis based on the detailed conflict sensitivity checklist to identify possibilities for future action.

Checklist	Yes	No
The possibility of adaption / adjustment is part of the programme design and this is reflected in the budget.		
Your implementing partners are included in decisions concerning necessary adjustments of the FNS programme.		
There is regular contact with implementing partners, including field visits where possible.		
The implementing partners are aware of the key issues related to conflict sensitivity and are supported to operate in a conflict sensitive manner.		

Partnerships & complementarity:

Establishing synergies with other initiatives to contribute to stability

*Directly contributing to peace and conflict transformation is not generally among the core objectives of FNS programmes. By seeking synergies with other initiatives however, regular FNS interventions may still contribute to such goals. This third building block focuses on **complementarity with other programmes**, and not in the least to avoid programmes working against one another.*

Although contributing to stability may sometimes be adopted as an explicit goal in FNS programming, it can also be incorporated in less formalised actions or decisions such as the choice for a certain location or (combination of) beneficiaries. One important way to potentially contribute to stability without adopting it as an explicit goal of your programme is to establish collaborative ties with other initiatives implemented in the same area.

Key Issues

- **Maximising positive impact** and ensuring lasting effects is key for achieving meaningful change for stability. By seeking synergies with other initiatives, regular FNS programmes (i.e. those that do not take stability as a formal objective) have the potential to contribute to such change.
- At the very minimum, seeking synergies with initiatives implemented in your area of operation serves to avoid **programmes working against one another**. This is key to meet one of the basic requirements of conflict sensitivity of 'doing no harm'.
- At best, synergies can result in **increased efficiency and impact** without the need of additional resources. Programmes can build on and bolster each other's efforts by working together in various ways.
- Complementarity can vary in terms of intensity, which ranges from **unilateral adjustment** of your FNS programme to others, to **active cooperation** or **close partnerships** with programmes that focus on other aspects of development (e.g. land rights, gender equality, employment), or on security (e.g. safety, rule of law, DDR).

- The form of synergies can vary as well and may include **sequencing programmes** (e.g. by working on land rights before working on upgrading land), **coordinating (smaller) initiatives around a lead programme** (e.g. by complementing value chain development with the provision of safe access to markets), or **integrating programmes** in various degrees (e.g. through a shared approach, monitoring or strategy).

What can you do?

- Identify what other programmes (FNS interventions as well as others) are being implemented in your target area, by the Dutch embassy as well as by other donors and organisations. Discuss whether there are options to link initiatives and establish cooperative ties. If so, formulate concrete actions to explore these possibilities.
- Consult other programmes, organisations and donors when designing and/or assessing your FNS intervention in order to identify possibilities for synergies and learn from their experiences.
- Think of small interventions that could be implemented alongside or before your (lead) FNS programme, which would contribute to achieving your key objectives or complement it in such a way that stability is promoted. Discuss what additional resources would be necessary.
- Conduct a SWOT analysis based on the detailed conflict sensitivity checklist to identify possibilities for action.

Checklist	Yes	No
There is an inventory of other programmes carried out in the same region as your (intended) programme and potential synergies are identified.		
A clear strategy is in place to establish synergies / cooperation with other initiatives in your region in order to promote stability.		
Other organisations and donors operating in your target area are consulted in the design, implementation and evaluation phases of your programme to promote synergies and better identify risks.		

Targeting & objectives:

Assessing and maximising sustainable impacts for stability

*This building block tackles not your FNS programme, but its **surrounding context as a point of departure**. Assessing the opportunities and limitations posed by the surrounding circumstances will help determine to what extent conflict sensitivity can yield results and what impact your FNS programme can realistically have on peace and stability.*

Key Issues

- Understanding the **factors and actors that determine (in)stability** in the region is indispensable, but insufficient for conflict sensitive programming. Additionally, it is important to determine to what extent these (f)actors can – or cannot – be influenced by means of your FNS programme. By adequately identifying limitations and options, appropriate choices can be made in terms of target groups and areas. Are interventions in certain sectors more likely to foster collaboration between groups of people? Are there opportunities to empower excluded and marginalised groups?
- Being conflict sensitive also means gaining insight into the **needs of and relationships between different stakeholders**. Having a thorough understanding of these needs and relations helps determine whether your FNS intervention is sufficiently inclusive and avoids biases.
- Part of conflict sensitive programming is related to the location of your FNS programming. **Geographical targeting** in FNS interventions includes questioning whether the chosen area is in fact most opportune. Are there other areas where you could have greater impact on stability with the same resources?
- ‘Having little future perspective’ can drive people to seek illicit – and often conflict conducive – means of making a living or moving away. Thus, a sustainable contribution to stability can only be achieved if the FNS intervention **offers beneficiaries a long-term perspective**, which matches with their needs and goals. This includes strategies to sustain perspective in the face of conflict – i.e. increasing resilience – for instance by preventing households from selling off their productive assets.

What can you do?

- Are there tensions or rifts between local groups / communities that can threaten stability? Are certain groups marginalised? Analyse possibilities of how your FNS intervention could bridge existing gaps or ameliorate tensions (e.g. by establishing ties through value chains or cooperatives, including multiple groups in collaborative programme design, etc.).
- Involve local stakeholders and beneficiaries of your FNS programme in the assessment of its conflict sensitivity. Does your intervention meet their needs? Do they feel you are benefitting one group more than the other or adding to existing tensions? What do they suggest you could change to contribute to stability?
- Having identified the possibilities and limitations of your programme, as well as the needs of the stakeholders affected by your intervention, assess critically whether your FNS objectives: 1) should serve as a means towards stability; or 2) should be an end in themselves with the goal of not adding to conflict and adding to stability as an ideal 'side effect'. Use this knowledge to make an informed decision on who your programme targets and where it is implemented.
- Determine at what level (national, regional, local) and to what extent the FNS programme can realistically contribute to stability. Which aspects of FNS could increase resilience and/or contribute to conflict transformation? Identify who – i.e. which organisation, what person – is best positioned to deliver what impact. Could changes be made to contribute to stability more effectively?
- Conduct a SWOT analysis based on the detailed conflict sensitivity checklist to identify possibilities for action.

Checklist	Yes	No
Possibilities for impact have been analysed, i.e. it is clear to what extent and on what level your FNS intervention can and should contribute to stability.		
The target group and area of your FNS intervention are selected in a conflict sensitive manner.		
Your programme contributes to beneficiaries' long-term perspective, i.e. it enhances or sustains desired livelihoods.		
Local stakeholders' opinions are taken into account in your FNS programme's design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.		