



# CONTEXT-SENSITIVE ENGAGEMENT:

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM SWISS EXPERIENCES IN SOUTH ASIA FOR AID EFFECTIVENESS IN FRAGILE SCENARIOS

prepared for

3rd High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, Accra, September 2008



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# **Context-sensitive engagement: Lessons learned from Swiss experiences in South Asia for aid effectiveness in fragile scenarios**

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A Report of the Conflict Prevention and Transformation Division (COPRET) and the South Asia Division of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

In collaboration with the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva.

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# Executive Summary

The following report was generated by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) upon the initiative of the Conflict Prevention and Transformation Division (COPRET), for the forthcoming High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, Ghana, on 2-4 September 2008. Based on Switzerland's long-term experiences in South Asia—particularly in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Pakistan—and in collaboration with SDC's South Asia Division, the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva was asked to critically assess the work conducted in these countries, and to distil lessons for engagement in fragile, conflict countries. The focus was placed on SDC's Conflict-Sensitive Programme Management (CSPM), viewed through the lens of the Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations that were established by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC) in April 2007.

Overall, Switzerland's decade-long work in South Asia confirms the importance of the ten DAC Principles, whilst also highlighting where certain key aspects may be further refined and elaborated. In particular, an analysis of SDC's practices emphasised the need for continuous monitoring and assessment of the fragile context in question. It is not enough for projects and programmes to react to changing circumstances. Possible future scenarios need to be developed, conceptualised, and possible means of proceeding incorporated into the management cycle.

The Swiss engagement in South Asia also points to the need to rethink the third DAC principle on state-building. If peacebuilding is indeed more than state-building per se—particularly in situations of armed violence where the state either lost its monopoly over violence or is itself one of the conflicting parties—knowing with whom to work is essential. But going beyond partnership with the state whilst not undermining state institutions represents an enormous challenge. Simply changing aid modalities to non-governmental organisations is not a sufficient solution.

Moreover, the Swiss experiences also demonstrate that for the implementation of the ten DAC principles, further emphasis needs to be put on strategy and management issues, and in particular on the link between the operational and political levels. For the management challenge of working in fragile, conflict-affected contexts is one that goes well beyond coordination among actors in the field, and between the field and headquarters. Engaging the right staff and designing comprehensive staff policies, including a “whole-of-government” approach, becomes a condition sine qua non. It also requires a proactive approach that includes mechanisms allowing for expertise to be drawn upon when and where it is needed, and for politically sensitive issues to not be decoupled from processes of operationalisation and implementation. Only then will engagement be comprehensive, conflict-sensitive, and ultimately effective.

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# Introduction

The *Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations* (hereon referred to as the ten DAC Principles), established by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC) in April 2007, represent a concrete effort to implement the ambitions set out in the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Indeed, the goal of this process—of which the upcoming High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, Ghana, 2-4 September 2008, is an intricate part—is to periodically review and modify the Principles in light of subsequent appraisals by donors of their development strategies, as well as efforts to distil best practices through comparative studies of donor programming.

In light of these principles, and explicitly adopting a donor perspective, the following pages will focus on the preconditions for aid effectiveness, as well as on the policy considerations and operational consequences of “staying engaged”. The report concludes by illustrating how the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has tackled these crucial issues through the implementation of its Conflict-Sensitive Programme Management (CSPM).

The authors would like to thank Jörg Frieden, Cristina Hoyos, Christoph Graf, Andreas Huber, Hans-Peter Reiser and Martin Stürzinger for their input and suggestions.

Briefly, the 10 DAC Principles are as follows:

1. Take context as the starting point;
2. Do no harm;
3. Focus on state-building as the central objective;
4. Prioritise prevention;
5. Recognise the links between political, security and development objectives;
6. Promote non-discrimination as a basis for inclusive and stable societies;
7. Align with local priorities in different ways in different contexts;
8. Agree on practical coordination mechanisms between international actors;
9. Act fast ... but stay engaged long enough to give success a chance; and
10. Avoid pockets of exclusion (so-called “aid orphans”).

*For the texts of the Paris Declaration and the DAC Principles, see:*

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf>  
and  
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/61/45/38368714.pdf>

## Swiss Programmes in South Asia

Alongside substantial development cooperation in Bangladesh, Bhutan and India, Switzerland can showcase long-standing engagement in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Pakistan. While only Nepal is currently a priority country for SDC, there has been continual support in all four of these countries for decades. Indeed, Switzerland held the chair of the Afghanistan Support Group in 2000, thereby playing a major role in donor coordination there.

The Swiss government's engagement in Nepal spans more than five decades, with livelihood activities in rural areas constituting the bulk of the work conducted by SDC. Since 2005, this work has been combined with peace and human rights activities in order to enhance the effectiveness of Switzerland's support to reducing political and social conflict in the country. The overall goal of the forthcoming Swiss Strategy for Nepal (2009-2012) is to support inclusive, democratic state-building, as well as to promote human security and socio-economic development. Emphasis is placed on the implementation of the peace agreements, and on ensuring equitable access of women and men, and in particular disadvantaged groups, to rights, public goods and services.

Given Sri Lanka's comparatively high level of development despite long-lasting armed conflict, the majority of Switzerland's efforts have been in building peace and promoting human rights. Nevertheless, SDC has also been working in the country, supplying humanitarian aid and development cooperation to conflict-affected regions since the 1990s. Apart from a series of specific conflict-relevant development and media initiatives, the overall focus has in past years been on efforts to find a political solution to the armed conflict, and on reducing human suffering caused by the violence as well as by natural disasters. The OECD-DAC evaluation guidelines are taken as the primary benchmark for internal assessment of all these activities.

In Afghanistan, SDC's work began more than twenty years ago with special programmes in the realm of humanitarian aid. After the fall of the Taliban regime, SDC opened a permanent Cooperation Office in Kabul in 2002, while strengthening its longer-term development work in favour of the Afghan people. The current strategy is based on an understanding that development is not only needed and possible but is indeed already working in Afghanistan. As a relatively small donor, Switzerland can contribute to the rebuilding of the country by making use of its strategic advantages as a neutral actor. Combining policy with operational strategies, it provides expertise in the rule of law, sub-national governance, and sustainable livelihood.



An SDC-Helvetas delegation meets with a village council to discuss the details of a development project in Samangan Province, Afghanistan.

Similarly, Switzerland's engagement in Pakistan, spanning a period of over four decades, has focused on the alleviation of poverty, on the fight against discrimination, and on support to disadvantaged parts of the population. Additional humanitarian assistance was granted following the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir. SDC's work focuses on strengthening local governance through processes of decentralisation and the promotion of the rights of women and children, as well as on income generation through the improved management of natural resources and through micro-financing.

# Conflict-sensitivity and comprehensive engagement: policy implications for aid effectiveness

## Preconditions for aid effectiveness in fragile, conflict contexts

### Staying engaged

In fragile countries marred by armed violence, efforts to “stay engaged” become in itself part of the donor contribution. Whether to stay engaged within a particular development programme, or rather within a mix of humanitarian, development, human rights or peace interventions, depends on the respective development context. Swiss experiences in South Asia demonstrate that development programmes cannot only be adapted to fragile contexts, but also to situations of armed conflict in an effective way.

### Understanding the context and adapting programmes accordingly

Experiences gained from the Swiss programmes in South Asia confirm the first of the ten DAC Principles: development programmes must stringently adapt their strategic focus to the respective context. The degree to which this entails shifts in focus obviously depends on the extent of state fragility and the level—both real and perceived—of armed violence.

The development context in fragile situations can change very rapidly. When devising possible working scenarios, being prepared for diverse future developments is thus key. Such scenarios serve two purposes: they inform programme and project development, and can be used as a means to heighten awareness among donors and agencies of the requirements of joint future action.

Scenarios thus need to be as specific as possible, and should also include a mechanism to assess their validity and relevance—when, for instance, could the next scenario be applied? This is illustrated by the Swiss mid-term country strategies in fragile contexts, which entail a number of possible scenarios to inform planning and programming.

In order to better understand these contexts and thus be in a position to adapt programmes accordingly, the Swiss Government has developed its own instrument for context assessment. The so-called MERV (the German acronym for the monitoring of development-relevant changes in circumstances) is applied in all partner countries with varying frequency; in countries experiencing armed conflict, the frequency is usually between one and three months.

MERV assessments are jointly produced by the country teams consisting of development, humanitarian and diplomatic staff on the international and local levels. In some countries, regular local risk assessments complement this standard instrument. Depending on the situational analysis, programming and annual planning are fine-tuned in line with the MERV cycle.

### **Box 1—Monitoring fragile, conflict situations: the case of Sri Lanka**

*Switzerland’s Medium Term Plan 2007-2009 for Sri Lanka stipulates that “Fragile conflict situations are subject to rapid changes. Thus programme activities shall be adapted on a regular basis in a conflict sensitive way to the changing political and security context, applying the scenario approach given in Annex 2.” That particular annex then defined three main scenarios (1. peace agreement; 2. no war, no peace; 3. armed conflict in the North-East / open conflict) as well as several sub-scenarios. It was also decided that an exit criterion would apply “if and when the political context deteriorates to a point where the successful achievement of the Swiss programme’s goals are rendered impossible”.*

*Ever since, the context in Sri Lanka has been carefully monitored by Swiss actors based in the country. The main sources of information are reports from the United Nations, such as from the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), from the Field Offices of SDC (in Jaffna in the North and Matara in the South), and regular meetings and reports from Swiss NGOs, which are represented in almost all the districts in the conflict area and with whom close cooperation exists. Other sources are quarterly reports, addressed to the entire donor community, by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), which was commissioned on behalf of the Donor Peace Support Group (DPSG) to monitor and analyse a series of critical factors; and, of course, reports from field visits of the Bilateral Donor Group (BDG) and from various NGOs. A Swiss Monthly Report with contributions from the Embassy, SDC and Swiss NGOs dealing with the political context, human rights, security, the humanitarian situation and with updates from districts is sent to Berne.*

*All the above mentioned information is then analysed and incorporated into the MERV, conducted every three months. The MERV process involves a half-day workshop devoted to analysing the context, thereby adding the perspectives of involved Swiss actors into the analysis. Different perceptions are discussed and conclusions drawn for the continuation of the work. Every six months the Swiss actors then conduct an in-depth analysis of the situation either during the Annual Planning Session or during the Mid-Term Review. Here the context is discussed further at length, the security and safety of staff members assessed, and programme adaptations agreed upon accordingly.*

### **Defending humanitarian access and the space for development**

Protecting the space for development as long as possible—especially in rural areas—has proven to be a crucial condition for staying engaged. The presence of SDC and its partners in the field has had positive

effects on the protection of these rural populations. Moreover, SDC was thus able to transfer local information to the national and international level. The space for development and/or humanitarian action has been additionally protected through the lending of support to local, national and international human rights initiatives, as well as through the implementation of the “Basic Operating Guidelines” (see Box 2) in Nepal and Sri Lanka, to which the majority of donors and agencies have agreed.

#### **Box 2—Basic Operational Guidelines (BOGs) for Nepal**

*When international donors collaborate, they generally do so by forming a variety of donor groups, such as the working group on the peace process in Nepal. In October 2003, after the failure of the second round of negotiations between the government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), donors formulated twelve Basic Operating Guidelines, in which they declared their commitment to poverty reduction and impartiality in the armed conflict. This declaration has served as a catalyst for improved operational coordination in conflict-affected areas of the country. To this end, donors and agencies established a permanent working group (known as the BOG group) that has met regularly since 2005. Switzerland has held the chair of the group since its inception and has been contributing to it in various ways: it provides information from the conflict-affected areas through its local risk assessments in the field, and it is actively engaged in facilitating closer ties between bilateral and multilateral donors.*

## Security and risk management

Staying engaged in zones of armed conflict implies a stronger focus on security and risk management than might otherwise be the case, to the point at which it becomes part of the operational routine. The Swiss programmes combine ongoing local risk assessments for the benefit of these programmes with cooperation and information exchange with other donors and agencies. An important component of security and risk management is staff training—both in terms of technical security awareness, as in terms of “political” risk assessment.

## Staying engaged—but how?

### Policy considerations

#### Ending armed conflicts

The Swiss programmes in South Asia confirm that the successful elimination of armed violence is a precondition for long-term engagement in fragile states. While development is still possible under conditions of armed conflict—as illustrated by the work undertaken in Nepal, Sri Lanka or Afghanistan—sustainable development requires more than the mere cessation of hostilities.

It follows from the above insight that development actors need to actively engage in conflict transformation as a precondition for aid effectiveness. Instead of merely addressing the perceived causes of conflict through development projects (focusing on inequalities and exclusion, for instance), lessons from Nepal and Sri Lanka show that bilateral and joint donor responses addressing political questions and dealing with political actors are crucial for contributing to an end to armed violence and furthering post-conflict transformation.

## Peacebuilding and state-building: the same endeavour?

The experiences of the Swiss programmes in South Asia highlight the shortcomings of a widely-held belief that peacebuilding is synonymous with state-building. While it is certainly true that a functioning state apparatus and effective public service delivery are part-and-parcel of long-term development strategies in fragile, conflict-affected countries (a point that the third DAC principle makes very well), this should not be the only focus of attention. Peacebuilding is much more than state-building per se. It involves engaging individuals, those whose lives and livelihoods are at stake, and whose interactions with their families, neighbourhoods and local communities make up the social fabric that has been undermined by armed violence. In this regard, the concept of human security is a powerful tool allowing issues of local empowerment, human rights and participatory processes to be linked up with a concern over the security and welfare of the individual.

Indeed, the human security agenda lies at the heart of Switzerland’s vision of how to pursue its peace promotion and development activities abroad (see Box 3). Crucially, human security is a people-centred concept, highlighting the fallacies involved in embarking upon post-conflict peacebuilding either with blueprints drawn from the teleological end point of the liberal (secure) state, or driven by the institutional and bureaucratic imperatives of external actors. Asserting that a country is to be placed on the path towards liberal statehood does not help people in the street solve their daily existential dilemmas and will not be taken seriously by them. SDC’s engagement in South Asia confirms that local ownership, community participation and a context-sensitive content analysis of the specific circumstances are key to successful programming.

#### **Box 3 – The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development**

*One human security-related initiative that is actively supported by the Swiss Government is the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development. Building on progress made to implement the*

*2001 UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA) and the 1997 OECD-DAC Guidelines on Helping Prevent Violent Conflict, the 2006 Geneva Declaration highlights the critical role for states and civil society in preventing and reducing violence associated with war, crime, and social unrest.*

*Crucially, the Geneva Declaration is a multilateral initiative supported by a wide bandwidth of developed and developing countries. Endorsed by more than 90 states, the Declaration calls for “initiatives to prevent and reduce human, social and economic costs of armed violence, to assess risks and vulnerabilities, to evaluate the effectiveness of armed violence reduction programmes, and to disseminate knowledge of best practices”. Together with complementary regional declarations in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the South Pacific, the Declaration seeks to make demonstrable reductions in the global burden of armed violence and improvements in human security by 2015.*

*In order to implement the Geneva Declaration through concrete measures, a core group of twelve states coordinated by Switzerland is responsible for advancing the goals of the Geneva Declaration. They are responsible for designing concrete measures in the fields of “Advocacy, Dissemination and Coordination”, “Measurability and Research” and “Programming”. Chaired by Switzerland, the core group finalized a Framework for the Implementation of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development in June 2007. In order to enhance transparency and promote good practice, a Global Burden of Armed Violence Report will be launched in September 2008 and a selection of focus countries will undertake practical initiatives.*

*For further information see <http://www.geneva-declaration.org/index.html>*

### **Peacemaking, human rights, and dealing with the past: reconciling conflicting agendas**

While peacemaking tries to bring together the armed parties for dialogue, human rights initiatives tend to be rather critical towards these very actors. It is thus often difficult to combine the two sets of activities. Nonetheless, the work of the Swiss Government confirms that initiatives in the field of human rights can indeed be supportive of peacemaking. In Nepal, the deployment of the largest-ever UN human rights monitoring mission accelerated the signing of a peace deal—the respective parties to the conflict were the focus of international observation; this in turn put pressure on them to end the armed conflict.

Overall, the link between the operational and policy levels of development work was crucial for the preparation of the UN mission in Nepal. The Swiss Government made systematic use of data gathered from local human rights monitoring, in combination with data from their own development work on the ground, in order to provide the international community in Nepal and abroad with much-needed information that effectively paved the way for the political decision-making process to agree to establish the mission.

### **From alignment to people-centred development: who are the partners, and whose ownerships counts?**

Weak government policies and institutions, exacerbated by armed conflict and the difficulties faced by government to reach out to rural areas, generally make it necessary to change the focus of development programmes. Working mainly through the government is no longer sufficient, necessitating the adoption of a more bottom-up, people-centred approach to development.

The main interlocutors of local communities and user committees have been international and local NGOs, or the “social mobilisers” of projects. SDC was able to build on its rich experiences with community-oriented development, as well as on the decades of experience of Swiss partner NGOs, in order to adapt its programming effectively.

The main advantage of people-centred development work is that it can be combined with alignment: as the cases of Afghanistan and Nepal demonstrate, once government is willing and able to recommence public service provision, programming can again be adjusted from a more people-centred approach to one of greater cooperation and coordination with the state apparatus. Key to such a move from under-harmonised action to greater coordination and alignment is the right mix of assistance modalities. A specific focus on sequencing is thus essential.

**Box 4—Examples of people-centred, community-based development by SDC’s livelihood partners in Afghanistan**

*Delivering substantial services to rural parts of Afghanistan has always been an extreme challenge for government, even during more stable and peaceful times than are witnessed today. Support by national and international organisations aiming to access remote areas and tackle the burden of high delivery costs remains crucial.*

*1. The National Solidarity Program (NSP) is one example of the use of a people-centred approach to community development. By facilitating the election of Community Development Councils (CDCs), the NSP provides rural Afghan communities with the ability to voice their own development needs by identifying problems, and creates sustainable programmes to offer solutions. Through ongoing collaboration with the CDCs, organisations are reinforcing the capacities of these communities, enabling them to take an active role in their own long-term development.*

*2. Oxfam GB is currently implementing a livelihood improvement programme funded by SDC in the Shahr-e-Buzurg and Yawan districts of Badakhshan, in the north-eastern part of the country. Using community-based organisations, Oxfam GB aims to improve agricultural and livestock practices, and as such has trained para-veterinarians and basic veterinary workers (BVWs) to provide vaccination and treatment services to farmers and*

*livestock owners when these services are not provided by the government.*

*3. Afghanaid provides assistance in the field of agriculture, livestock, micro-financing, income generation and capacity-building to the remote areas of Samangan Province. Their work is often implemented by the CDCs, or through the traditional Shuras (councils). Afghanaid helps communities by providing new agricultural technologies to farmers, as well as improved wheat seed and fertilizers to increase yield and increase food security in the target districts.*

*4. In the field of education, community-based work is being conducted through the establishment of primary schools in rural villages, where long distances previously often prevented children from attending school. Such schools are managed and financed by communities, with support for teacher training, provision of education material, and curriculum development, facilitated by organisations with expertise in these areas. Additionally the development of Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs) enables parents to take an active role in the school management and improves the teaching and learning environment.*

**All or nothing: towards a whole-of-government approach to development assistance**

One of the key insights in foreign policy and development circles over the past ten to fifteen years has been that security and development concerns are intricately linked, and that effective work abroad requires a joint strategy from diplomatic, defence and development actors. The resulting “whole-of-government” approach, outlined in the fifth DAC Principle, is one also advocated by Switzerland.

Switzerland recognises that more coordination, coherence and better integration among policy communities within a government is a precondition for improved results and greater impact. The challenges posed by post-conflict peacebuilding environments require the engagement and participation of diverse governmental actors—with particular emphasis on

roles, leadership and experience. A whole-of-government approach can contribute to the overall objective of long-term development and stability because it is based on the realisation that development actors cannot support conflict transformation on their own.

Moreover, the whole-of-government approach implicitly acknowledges that it remains unclear whether development is a precondition for security, or vice versa. Until the 1990s, the commonly held view in economic and development circles was that development is a *precondition* for security, and that increased economic development would almost automatically reduce the incidence of armed conflict within—and potentially even between—states. Recently, however, this view has increasingly been put in doubt: in a situation of scarcity, development assistance and relief are precious commodities. If wrongly distributed, they may reinforce social cleavages and, paradoxically, sow the seeds of conflict and insecurity, rather than alleviate them.

The benefits from pursuing a whole-of-government approach are amply illustrated by Switzerland's engagement in South Asia. Helped along by the creation of posts of special advisor for peacebuilding and/or human rights, joint commitment by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, in particular by SDC and the Political Divisions, together with other branches of the Swiss Government—notably the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), and the Directorate for Security Policy of the Swiss Federal Department for Defence, Protection and Sport (DDPS)—is becoming reality. The establishment of Inter-Agency Working Groups on issues such as security sector reform (SSR) bears testimony to this. Thus development work goes hand-in-hand with analyses of the geo-strategic climate and economic conditions, as well as with national and international mediation and facilitation efforts. Equality, local empowerment, respect for human rights, and processes of political reform are just some of the issues of joint concern.

### **Harmonisation: merging donor agendas in a complex environment**

Donor harmonisation, the focus of the eighth DAC Principle, is yet another essential ingredient to effective development work. Swiss experiences in South

Asia clearly demonstrate that fragile and conflict situations foster donor collaboration as the need to respond to common threats and challenges becomes greater than in “normal” development contexts. Moreover, in conflict situations the national interests of single donors may well predominate. Fragile contexts thus present an opportunity for enhanced coordination in the field, as well as a means of bridging potential political divides that may result from diverging interests.

The effective use of donor leverage in support of conflict transformation and development requires a common understanding of the fragile context in question, and joint response strategies by involved donors and international actors in response to the demands of political actors. Working towards a higher degree of donor harmonisation is hence a means of working towards a common understanding of a particular political development context.

As Box 5 illustrates, even if differing perspectives among some of the development banks and bilateral donors (as well as the political divide with regard to the war on terrorism) could not always be rendered fully commensurable, Swiss advocacy within the donor community and vis-à-vis the development banks has been an important contribution to the aim of streamlining development efforts in fragile, conflict environments.

#### ***Box 5—The Swiss intervention at the Board of the World Bank Board in Washington: the plea for a coherent strategy for reform and development in Nepal during the armed conflict***

*An Executive Director represents Switzerland (and other countries) at the Board of the World Bank. During the later phase of the armed conflict in Nepal, this director regularly received the assessments of the overall development environment written by the Swiss Nepal Cooperation Office (COOF). COOF provided a critical analysis of the World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy that had been presented to the World Bank Board in October 2003 (and which had largely ignored the*

*reality of the conflict). It also supplied the Swiss office in Washington with updated assessments of the Bank's operations in Nepal.*

*The work of COOF allowed the Swiss Executive Director in the World Bank Board to engage in a dialogue with the Bank management in Washington, as well as with the Bank's Country Director in Nepal. It is, of course, uncertain to what extent these exchanges have influenced the Bank's attitude toward development and conflict in Nepal, given that the Bank remains fundamentally agnostic towards the political conflict. The Bank continues to stress that it is a non-political body and that it is possible to pursue development objectives in this country without taking explicitly into account the reality of the political confrontations. Nevertheless, the process does show to what extent development actors can make crucial contributions to high-level dialogue, in this case between a representative of Switzerland and the World Bank.*

*On the role of the World Bank in situations of fragility and conflict, see the recent publication by International Alert, 'The World Bank in fragile and conflict-affected countries: "How", not "How Much"'. The study was financed by SDC, and picks up on many of the activities currently on the agenda in Nepal and elsewhere.*

*[http://www.international-alert.org/pdf/WBank\\_in\\_fragile\\_and\\_conflict-affected\\_c.pdf](http://www.international-alert.org/pdf/WBank_in_fragile_and_conflict-affected_c.pdf)*

## Operational consequences

### Contextualising “do no harm”

An important lesson from all of the four countries under review is that the adoption of a “do no harm” or conflict-sensitive approach to development, as outlined in the second DAC principle, needs to be a concrete, operational and context-specific endeavour—otherwise it remains a black box for operational staff and partners. Introducing conflict-related transversal themes, such as the social root causes of conflict, into all projects is one key way of achiev-

ing this. Factors such as ethnicity, cast systems, the role of women or even the marginalisation of particular geographical areas can thus be integrated into all development activities.

Practise shows that mainstreaming “conflict” into development or humanitarian programmes is more sustainable as a people-centred learning experience rather than a tool-based training approach. Instead of giving such tool-based training to expatriate staff, SDC has therefore put its local programme officers and project staff at the heart of an explicit “learning-by doing” process.

*For more information on SDC's application of “do no harm” see, for instance,*

*[http://www.sdc.admin.ch/en/Home/Themes/Conflict\\_prevention\\_and\\_transformation/Conflict\\_prevention/Violence\\_prevention/ressources/ressource\\_en\\_92757.pdf](http://www.sdc.admin.ch/en/Home/Themes/Conflict_prevention_and_transformation/Conflict_prevention/Violence_prevention/ressources/ressource_en_92757.pdf)*

### Civil society: more than just NGOs

As the third DAC Principle argues, engaging civil society is, without a doubt, one of the most crucial elements of effective development work, particularly in fragile contexts. Especially in conflict and post-conflict scenarios, when state structures are either weak, inexistent, corrupt, or unjustifiably authoritarian, civil society organisations (CSOs) are the key to any people-centred, community-based initiatives. Of course, civil society and the state are in a symbiotic relationship with each other, and elements of both are needed for the basic functions of security, welfare and representation to be fulfilled.

Erroneously, civil society is often equated with non-governmental organisations—engaging civil society is taken to mean engaging more with NGOs. Such a perspective is highly misleading, for while NGOs may indeed be the most numerous and visible type of CSO, they may at times also be of relatively little importance. Empirical evidence from various countries, however, seems to suggest that donors tend to support moderate, middle class groups that often act as “gatekeepers” vis-à-vis other groups in society. The “genuine” civil society—professional and stu-

dent associations, unions, traditional and religious groups, and so on—is simply ignored, often to the peril of the entire mission.

For donors, finding new local partners is always more strenuous than continuing to work with the ones they already know. Hence, relatively little effort is put into finding an interlocutor appropriate with regard to what is trying to be achieved. Existing mass-based organisations and trade unions consequently tend to be neglected as potential partners for civil society support—in contrast, many of these new, national, urban NGOs that donors do engage have a weak membership base, a lack of country-wide and balanced political or ethnic representation, and are often linked to the political establishment through kin relationships. The potential detrimental effects of such pernicious donor preferences are clear: donor-driven civil society initiatives focusing on NGOs limit the capacity to create domestic social capital and ownership for the peace process, thereby undermining empowerment and leaving domestic groups in a weak and subordinate position.

*For further information on the role of civil society in fragile, conflict contexts see:*

*[http://www.ccdp.ch/projects/civil\\_society.htm](http://www.ccdp.ch/projects/civil_society.htm)*

**Box 6—Increasing the safety fund for media workers in Sri Lanka: a different kind of civil society support**

*The fragile situation in Sri Lanka is characterised by a diversity of conflict lines. The one receiving the most international attention is the struggle between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), with the transformation into armed conflict engendering its own dynamics.*

*After almost two decades of fighting, a ceasefire agreement was concluded in 2002, brokered with a view towards serious peace negotiations. That process failed, and since mid-2006 a fully fledged war has resumed, with the Government again pursuing the ambition of defeating the LTTE militarily.*

*Media freedom has been seriously curtailed since the resumption of armed conflict. Journalists have been intimidated, and at least 20 media workers, most of them Tamils, have been killed since 2006. The perpetrators of these acts are unknown, as investigations into the cases usually fail and impunity prevails. Meanwhile, journalists from all communities (Tamil, Sinhala, and Muslim) are under attack. In particular, journalists reporting on war operations and the army have faced life-threatening warnings and physical assault throughout 2007 and 2008—a situation that is still ongoing.*

*The international donor community, which had already been supporting the media sector through various programmes, has reacted by deciding to increase the already existing safety fund for journalists. The aim is not only to save lives, but also to ensure the existence of a local journalistic workforce that will later be able to report comprehensively on the situation and thus inform the wider public about current events.*

*The safety fund is operated by local organisations. It provides safe houses for journalists, supports families financially whose bread-earners cannot work because of intimidation, and helps media workers leave the country.*

## Systematic adaptation of all activities to fragile and conflict contexts

The table below shows the different requirements when development work is applied in “normal”, fragile and armed conflict contexts respectively. It highlights changes in emphasis and nuance depending

on the result of the monitoring process. The point is that adaptation of development programmes is only possible if all aspects are systematically—i.e. sequentially or simultaneously—taken into consideration.

	‘Normal’	Fragile state	Armed conflict
<b>Development Effectiveness</b>	Preparing programmes for joint donor response in support of Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS).	Staying engaged and working in part according to development needs to cope with and address state fragility pro-actively.	Staying engaged during armed conflict = development contributes to conflict transformation (CT), which in turn creates the conditions for development. Safety of staff is a major concern and influences analysis and decisions.
<b>Government as main actor in development</b>	Government the main actor in donor coordination for PRS implementation.	Weak government might not constitute the central actor for PRS coordination and implementation. People-centred development needed.	Government is a party to the conflict and does not have access to all areas of country => cannot be the only actor for development. People-centred development needed.
<b>Preparing programmes for donor harmonisation</b>	Making development programmes fit for PRS harmonisation: Geographical clusters for more synergies + development effectiveness  Introducing a whole-of-government approach:  Mid-term strategies	Making development programmes fit for PRS harmonisation: Geographical clusters for more synergies + development effectiveness  Introducing a whole-of-government approach  Shorter-term strategies might be needed, including work with scenarios	Making development programmes fit for CT harmonisation: Geographical clusters for more synergies + local risk assessment + protection and defence of development space.  Introducing a whole-of-government approach, including the peace policy department  Shorter-term strategies are needed, including work with scenarios
<b>Donor harmonisation</b>	Donor harmonisation in support of countries’ PRS	Donor harmonisation in support of countries’ PRS; however, the PRS might only serve as reference.	Donor harmonisation in support of CT and protection of space for development and human security for beneficiaries and staff. Common Basic Operating Guidelines, shared analysis as well as efforts to bridge potential divides among donors are crucial elements.
<b>Transversal themes</b>	As introduced by headquarters and adapted to the country context, e.g. gender, environment, HIV.  Themes need to be reflected in staff policy.	As introduced by headquarters and adapted to the country context, with particular emphasis on governance issues.  Themes need to be reflected in staff policy.	Including <i>conflict</i> relevant transversal themes (such as inclusion in the case of Sri Lanka or Nepal) adapted to the specific conflict. Themes need to be reflected in staff policy.
<b>Special projects</b>	Special programmes depending on the PRS and development context	Special programmes for good governance and/or counteracting state fragility	Special programmes focusing on human rights and peacebuilding
<b>Monitoring of development environment</b>	Monitoring of development environment (ex: MERV), usually once a year	Monitoring of development environment with additional emphasis on state fragility, usually every six months	Monitoring of development environment with emphasis on the conflict context, every six to twelve weeks.
<b>Additional components during the conflict</b>			Introducing risk assessment and security management. Introducing components to address consequences of armed conflict.

### **Programme adaptation: time and resource requirements**

In looking at the above table, it is important to consider the additional time requirements for programme management in the different contexts. At first glance, it may be concluded that programme management is qualitatively different from one development context to another, but that the change itself is not the source of large amounts of additional work. In fact, this all depends on the level of state fragility and armed conflict, as well as on the sophistication of the management strategy in place. When it comes to armed conflict on a level that concerns the entire country, additional components are required that will take up substantial amounts of time for country offices and their projects. Continuous monitoring of the situation and flexible process management strategies lie at the heart of the additional time adaptation will take. These considerations have to be also taken into account when recruiting staff; often, a revision of the terms of reference for existing staff members may be necessary.

### **Addressing the consequences of armed conflict**

When armed conflict further escalates it becomes necessary to respond to the deteriorating livelihood and human security situation. It is an important lesson that the consequences of armed conflict to a large extent could also be addressed by development programmes without introducing humanitarian action. In the case of Nepal this had been done through either adding quick impact activities to development project designs and implementation or starting new projects with a stronger focus on livelihood. In the case of Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, humanitarian and development projects are implemented in parallel.

### **Staying engaged: a management challenge**

Adapting a country programme to a fragile situation of armed conflict is primarily a management challenge. Management has to be flexible, open to changes, and possess a sound knowledge of the development political context. There also needs to be a willingness to go into the field and engage in dialogue with

the conflict parties, as well as to oversee operational requirements such as risk and security management and adequate staff policies. The ability to think out of the box is equally essential, and has to be reflected in the respective recruitment policies.

Of prime importance is not only coordination between field offices and headquarters, but also between various units within headquarters themselves. A fast and un-bureaucratic communication channel to multilateral bodies at both the local and international levels—for instance through Swiss liaison staff—is of additional value. In the case of the Swiss programmes the decentralised structures of SDC have made it easier to implement the programme adaptation process, and has been leading to the desired enhancement of coordination among different government departments at headquarters.

As a consequence of the management tasks and challenges involved, the SDC named its approach to working in fragile, conflict contexts: Conflict-Sensitive Programme Management (CSPM). CSPM is a management approach that addresses values, procedures, tools and communications for steering development and humanitarian programmes and their projects in a context of political tensions—prior, during or after violent conflict. CSPM represents a concrete means of anchoring conflict-sensitivity in SDC's overall programme cycle, and offers specific points of entry for adapting projects and programmes to changing scenarios and circumstances.

*Further information on the CSPM manual can be found at:*

[http://www.deza.admin.ch/en/Home/Themes/Conflict\\_prevention\\_and\\_transformation/Conflict\\_prevention/Violence\\_prevention/Handbook\\_Conflict\\_Sensitive\\_Programme\\_Management](http://www.deza.admin.ch/en/Home/Themes/Conflict_prevention_and_transformation/Conflict_prevention/Violence_prevention/Handbook_Conflict_Sensitive_Programme_Management)

## Concluding remarks

The aim of this publication was to distil lessons from SDC's Conflict-Sensitive Programme Management (CSPM) in light of the on-going efforts by the OECD-DAC, reflected in the High-Level Forum in Accra, of engaging critically and systematically with the issue of aid effectiveness. The preceding pages have attempted to contribute to this process by focusing on Swiss experiences in South Asia—in particular Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Overall, Switzerland's cooperation programming is already much in tune with the principles laid out by the OECD-DAC. Of course, the requirements, commitments and policy restrictions of any donor government mean that a balance has to be found between overarching principles and what decades of bilateral engagement have shown to work best. Nonetheless, the following tentative conclusions may be distilled:

- Conflict-sensitivity is, first and foremost, a **management task**. Monitoring changes in fragile, conflict contexts is all very well, but the utility of such efforts only lies in the mechanisms that are put in place to allow programming to consequently adapt.
- Development interventions in fragile contexts require **engagement at the political level**, and not only at the operational level. Adapting programmes to changing circumstances may well entail engaging with a different set of actors. The political preconditions and implications of such varying interactions need to be recognised and dealt with accordingly. This message, while implicit in the fifth DAC Principle, is in need of further emphasis and elaboration.
- Identifying linkages between **field realities** and policy decisions lies at the heart of a robust, evidence-based approach to development programming in fragile, conflict contexts. SDC's MERV cycle, in which development, humanitarian and diplomatic staff on the international and local levels join forces for regular monitoring updates of a particular country, is a prime example of this. It creates the conditions whereby programme adjustments can be made whilst at the same time contributing to informed policy decisions related to matters of development, human rights, or other national or international diplomatic initiatives.
- Conflict-sensitivity needs to be **concrete, operational**, and with a particular focus on **local ownership**. Conflict-sensitivity does not simply mean recognising that things need to be done differently in different contexts. Rather, it entails the establishment of a development machinery that is able to act and react swiftly and effectively, and without the subversion of the do-no-harm principle.
- Diversified collaboration with various types of **civil society organisations** (far beyond NGOs) is an essential part of a broad-based and pluralistic legitimisation of development activities. Fostering such partnerships in complement to those with "official" bodies is key to an effective strategy.
- **A whole-of-government** approach, as outlined in the fifth DAC Principle, is an essential prerequisite for conflict-sensitive development programming. Internal harmonisation is just as important as donor harmonisation as such: only strong and effective communication channels between country offices, various departments at headquarters, and the multilateral level, can improve both the impact and effectiveness of the aid that is being offered.
- Finally, the key element of conflict-sensitive programme management is a **flexible recruitment and staff policy**. Sensitisation to the subtleties of fragile contexts requires a proactive approach in both the field and at headquarters. A particular change of scenario may require a shift in focus and thus the involvement of expertise that may be found in other departments, government agencies or partner organisations. A policy of staying engaged requires long-term commitment, comprehensive programming, and making the most out of the human and material resources available.

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The **Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP)** is a newly created research entity of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. Its aim is to provide high-quality research and expert support, as well as to facilitate dialogue and networking internationally between policy-makers, practitioners and academics. The CCDP focuses its research and activities on the general phenomenon of armed violence (“conflict”), on efforts to foster the conditions that prevent the outbreak or recurrence of such violence (“development”), as well as on comprehensive and/or targeted strategies to promote peaceful relations on the communal, societal and international level (“peacebuilding”).

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