
CONFLICT, GOVERNANCE AND LEGITIMACY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

DECEMBER 2021



Conflict, Governance and Legitimacy Assessment Framework

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violent conflict is a major global threat to democratic development. Stabilizing conflict involves supporting governance through actors who the local population view as legitimate, as noted in the U.S. Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR). The Conflict, Governance and Legitimacy Assessment Framework enables users to establish an understanding of the conflict system *and* gain insight on locally legitimate governance actors and institutions.

The purpose of this framework is to guide conflict analysis undertaken by international organizations, partners and local actors in service of evidence-based democracy, human rights and governance (DRG) policies and programs. This resource takes an integrated approach that incorporates the most salient analytical components that are necessary to examine the interplay between conflict, governance and legitimacy. The framework is designed to be applied across various conflict contexts. While it is primarily intended to analyze localized conflict at the subnational level, the framework can be useful across a range of geographic scales as well.

After completing the core steps outlined in this framework, the user will better understand the factors that make up the conflict system, actors perceived to be legitimate by the local population and entry points to support governance and reduce violence. With this analysis, users can then design policies and programs that help bolster legitimate governance and mitigate conflict. To inform this policy and program design, users can consult the companion *“Field Guide for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Programming in Conflict-Affected Contexts.”* The field guide outlines programmatic interventions proven to strengthen democratic governance and promote peace. It provides evidence from innovative DRG interventions in fragile states and offers guidance for program implementation.

Step 1: Analyze the Nature of Conflict

Users should begin the assessment process by mapping and analyzing local dynamics to contextualize the drivers of violent conflict. This involves the following:

- First, identify the most pressing forms of violent conflict. This is critical because violent conflict is multifaceted and may manifest in different ways. Often, conflict can occur in cycles wherein tensions are underlying and can ebb and flow over time. As such, understanding the sources of tension, the history of conflict, the way the tension manifests and how conflict is expressed at different levels is key.
- Then, to further contextualize the analysis, pinpoint and assess the specific factors that drive conflict. Just as there are different types of conflict, there are also context-specific underlying root causes and triggers that can change the type of conflict. To do this, interrogate both the underlying drivers as well as the more visible triggers. This can involve an examination of inequalities, mistrust in institutions, identity-based fragmentations and informal norms or behaviors that drive support for violence or peace.
- Lastly, map the conflict system. Building off the previously identified factors that drive conflict, this entails analyzing direct and indirect conflict consequences in a community, as well as how drivers interact with the shifting motivations and tactics of both conflict and peace actors. This is important because the root causes of conflict are often fed by a complex system of overlapping issues—mapping them out within a system can point

out conflict factors reinforce and feed each other. As such, this requires an analysis of the effects of conflict, the incentives that support it and the relationships between these factors. Furthermore, internal and external trends are key to consider with regard to their impact on the conflict system.

Step 2: Assess the Effectiveness and Legitimacy of Key Institutions and Actors

In fragile settings, governance may occur outside of formal institutions; a holistic view of the conflict landscape requires a well-founded knowledge of the governance actors and institutions perceived as legitimate. This analysis can be done by 1) identifying key actors, 2) assessing the effectiveness and legitimacy of state institutions and actors, 3) assessing the legitimacy and effectiveness of nonstate governance providers and 4) conducting an in-depth actor analysis.

- Identifying key actors helps to understand which groups are relevant to the conflict system at the local, regional, national and international levels. Once actors are identified, it is possible to understand their role and operational capacities.
- Then, assess the effectiveness and legitimacy of state institutions and actors. When state institutions fail to have legitimacy, this creates an opening for nonstate actors to fill. Measuring legitimacy entails understanding both process and performance legitimacy as well as the shared identities or beliefs with the people they are representing. To assess effectiveness and commitment, interrogate the capacities, processes, priorities and levels of inclusion among varying actors and groups.
- Given that nonstate governance¹ is often prevalent in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, assessing the legitimacy and effectiveness of informal actors entails understanding where people go to resolve disputes; the trust, confidence and respect these nonstate governing bodies enjoy; how they are held accountable to the population; and the shared identities and beliefs they have. To assess effectiveness, intervenors should look at their capacities to deliver services and resources, their inclusiveness and their accessibility within the local communities.
- Once the user understands the legitimacy and effectiveness of various actors, conduct an in-depth analysis that further investigates the interests of actors, their identities and strategies, their capacities and resources that make them influential and their alliances and support bases that give them legitimacy. Actor mapping can take various forms, including stakeholder mapping, stakeholder analysis, dividers and connectors analysis and systems mapping.

¹ "Nonstate governance" refers to any governance activity carried out by an actor that is not part of the government. Actors could include tribal, customary or religious leaders; armed groups; and civil society, among others. "Governance" refers to the myriad ways in which people make and enforce rules to solve public policy problems, and/or collective action problems, whether at a community, national or global level. Nonstate actors can exercise governing authority by formulating and enforcing rules, policies and standards, as well as delivering services.

Step 3: Identify Entry Points for DRG Interventions

The final step of the framework involves identifying ways that DRG interventions can address causes of violence or bolster sources of resilience and associated opportunities for peace. This involves determining how policies or programs may interact with the conflict system, their consequences and identifying the most effective interventions, strategies and actors to engage.

INTRODUCTION

Violent conflict is one of the most persistent and impactful global threats to democratic development. Today, approximately two billion people live in countries affected by fragility and violent conflict.² Violent conflict not only upends the social contract between the state and the citizen, but also disrupts elections, inhibits service delivery and undermines trust in the democratic process.

Breakdowns in state legitimacy and effectiveness are often a source of violence in conflict-affected contexts. A critical step toward stabilizing a conflict-affected area, therefore, is supporting governance through actors who the local population views as legitimate, as noted in the U.S. Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR).³ Given the inherently political nature of conflict, legitimate governance⁴ can help increase trust in institutions and address the root causes of instability.

To design effective democracy, human rights and governance (DRG) policies and programming in conflict-affected contexts, it is critical to understand how assistance can support legitimate governance actors or systems. However, no existing framework captures discrete ways to measure legitimacy as part of conflict analysis and evidence-based program design. In conflict-affected contexts, there are often a range of informal and formal actors that govern by providing services, resolving communal issues and protecting citizens. Understanding how governance actors interact with conflict and estimating prospects for peace and development requires robust analytical tools. Applying one-size-fits-all interventions which fail to be responsive to conflict dynamics will at best produce a null result—at worst, such programming will exacerbate tensions and contribute to distrust of governance institutions. Therefore, programs aimed at disrupting cycles of violence and strengthening legitimate governance must use a context-specific lens for planning, implementation and evaluation.

² *Fragility, Conflict, and Violence*. World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview>.

³ *Stabilization Assistance Review: A Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts To Stabilize Conflict-Affected Areas*. Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, U.S. Department of State, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/reports/stabilization-assistance-review-a-framework-for-maximizing-the-effectiveness-of-u-s-government-efforts-to-stabilize-conflict-affected-areas-2018/>.

⁴ “Governance” refers to the myriad ways in which people make and enforce rules to solve public policy problems and/or collective action problems, whether at a community, national or global level. At the level of the state, governance implies an ability to formulate and enforce rules and provide services, regardless of the kind of regime (democratic/nondemocratic). It entails interactions between the traditions and institutions through which authority is exercised and mediated. Governance is generally understood as actual performance on providing services, not merely the set of procedures of a Weberian bureaucracy. It can be provided by formal institutions of the state, or a host of informal actors who enjoy local legitimacy, such as religious, tribal or customary leaders; civil society; or sometimes armed groups.

Conducting a Conflict, Governance and Legitimacy Assessment: A Step-by-Step Guide

Pre-Assessment: Prepare for a Conflict, Governance and Legitimacy Assessment

- ✓ Design a research plan rooted in best practices
- ✓ Define the scope
- ✓ Determine data collection methodology and sources
- ✓ Create a timeline and process

Step One: Analyze the Nature of Conflict

- ✓ Identify the different forms of conflict in a society
- ✓ Understand factors that drive conflict
- ✓ Map the conflict system and identify key actors

Step Two: Assess the Effectiveness and Legitimacy of Key Institutions and Actors

- ✓ Assess the effectiveness and legitimacy of state institutions and actors
- ✓ Assess the effectiveness and legitimacy of nonstate actors
- ✓ Conduct an in-depth actor analysis

Step Three: Identify Entry Points for DRG Interventions

Consistently update the Conflict, Governance and Legitimacy Assessment Framework to capture evolving trends.

About the Conflict, Governance and Legitimacy Assessment Framework

The purpose of the Conflict, Governance and Legitimacy Assessment Framework is to guide analysis undertaken by international organizations, partners and local actors to help design evidence-based DRG policies and programs. This resource takes an integrated approach that incorporates the most salient analytical components that are necessary to examine conflict and governance, particularly related to legitimacy. Analytical tools like this framework will help build capacity for analysis, promote conflict-sensitivity in planning, program design and implementation, and address a critical conceptual gap in existing frameworks.

This framework is designed to be applied across different conflict contexts. While it is primarily intended to analyze localized conflict at the subnational level, the framework can be useful across a range of geographic scales. By following the core steps laid out in this framework, stakeholders will be able to design policies and programs that help bolster legitimate governance and mitigate conflict. The assessment begins by establishing an understanding of the conflict system. Once this is analyzed, it is then possible to gain insight on how locally legitimate governance actors and systems are situated and recognized by the community. Finally, building on this analysis, the final step is to identify the opportunities for peace and entry points for intervention. These steps are outlined on the left.

While this framework is a starting point, it is important to tailor these assessment components to be context-specific in order to capture the most salient information. The illustrative questions listed in each section can be selected and combined based on the user's needs and preferences.

Methodology

The International Republican Institute (IRI) conducted a systematic literature review to inform the framework. It involved analyzing results from democracy and governance programming, applicable data from randomized control trials and reports or evaluations from implementers who have used a credible methodology. IRI also reviewed all available conflict assessment frameworks and incorporated relevant elements into the resource. Finally, IRI piloted the framework by conducting community-level surveys, focus groups and interviews in Kenya and Bangladesh. IRI integrated lessons learned and refined the resources based on the pilot research.

Pre-assessment: Preparing for the Conflict, Governance and Legitimacy Assessment

Before conducting your conflict, governance and legitimacy assessment, develop a research plan. To ensure a high-quality product, the assessment and plan should be rooted in the following best practices and principles:⁵

- **Local Ownership:** Local ownership and input into the conflict analysis process will produce a superior product and increase the likelihood of success of the resultant intervention. This is because conflict can result from seemingly invisible or insignificant societal divisions, or be spurred by specific historical events, the significance of which outsiders may be unaware of. In many cases, external intervenors can also be seen as less legitimate actors than local stakeholders—this can impact the outcome and sustainability of a project.
- **Participatory Approach:** Participatory approaches to data collection allow for the inclusion and representation of all viewpoints, which is essential to understanding the multitude of perspectives of conflict and how to mitigate it. A participatory approach includes both utilizing diverse sources of data and being intentional about determining what stakeholders to engage during data collection. Beyond ensuring sectoral representation (see list of actors in Section II), intervenors should also guarantee representation by age, gender and ethnic diversity depending on the local context.
- **Triangulating Data:** To ensure the validity of data, and objectivity in the assessment, it is essential to triangulate information from at least two different sources. This can be done through interviews with local stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds, expert interviews and desk research.
- **Conflict Sensitivity and Do No Harm:** In conflict-affected contexts, conducting research—if not done correctly—can have unintended consequences. Failing to understand the actors, local capacities or accurately defining the conflict drivers, for example, can have negative consequences on the conflict dynamics. Taking into account all of these best practices and principles, from ensuring local ownership of projects to triangulation of data, can help intervenors ensure objectivity in data collection and analysis. Using a conflict-sensitive lens to mitigate the risk of making the conflict scenario worse is critical in governance interventions, as this can have long-lasting effects on the local context.
- **Gender Sensitivity:** Gendered norms, roles and dynamics can lead to disparate impacts of conflict even within a singular community. As such, using a gender-sensitive lens is necessary to ensure that programming appropriately addresses the gendered effects and drivers of conflict. This involves examining the conditions in a community that lead to marginalization and the production of hierarchies and patriarchal norms. Gender-sensitive considerations are noted throughout this framework.

⁵ *Conducting a Conflict and Development Analysis (CDA)*. United Nations Development Group, 2016, https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/UNDP_CDA-Report_v1.3-final-opt-low.pdf; *Conflict Analysis Framework: Field Guidelines and Procedures*. Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, November 2017, https://www.gppac.net/files/2018-11/GPPAC%20CAFGuide_Interactive%20version_febr2018_.pdf.

With these guiding principles in mind, the research plan should consider the following elements:

- **Scope:** Define the geographic and temporal scope of the project, while considering existing conflict assessments conducted by other organizations that could be built upon.
- **Time and Resources:** Determine the amount of time and resources you have to conduct the assessment, including preparation, fieldwork and analysis. This includes implications for personnel and availability, as many of these data collection tools can be time and personnel-intensive. Adjust the scope as needed to account for time and resource constraints.
- **Data Collection Methodology and Sources:** Based on available time and resources, determine the range of data collection methods and associated tools you will deploy for the assessment, ideally utilizing a range of primary and secondary sources to ensure data quality. Primary sources included interviews with key actors (see list in Section II), public opinion polling, focus groups and crowdsourcing. Secondary sources include books, articles, other assessments and quantitative data.
- **Report Format:** Prior to conducting research, determine how you want to present the data so that researchers can easily add their contributions. You may wish to organize the data differently for various audiences, but be clear from the start about the end goal to ensure that data is collected, noted and reported on in a way that meets the needs of the final product.
- **Timeline and Process:** Develop a timeline and process, including roles and responsibilities, for the conduct of the assessment to stay within scope and ensure the timely completion of the assessment per programmatic needs. The process should also include a plan to regularly update the assessment to ensure its ongoing relevance both for understanding the conflict and to inform programmatic interventions.

Identifying Research Methodologies

The Conflict, Governance and Legitimacy Assessment Framework is designed to be applied through a range of research methodologies. Some methods may be more useful than others for different steps of conducting an assessment. The nature of inquiry should inform the selection of an appropriate research approach. Some questions are best answered using a single research method, while others are more amenable to a combination of research approaches.

Prior to selecting research methods, it is critical to tailor the scope of the assessment to the context by identifying the research objectives and key questions. This will help determine which methodologies may help elicit desired data points. For example, if a village is affected primarily by pastoral and land conflict, as well as violent extremism, structure the assessment in a way that captures how these dynamics reinforce each other.

Outlined in the table is an overview of key methods that are relevant to uncovering the information laid out in this framework.

Key Research Methodologies

Desk Review

Description

Desk reviews can entail a review of relevant academic and policy research literature. Such reviews can help in understanding the key debates, issues and challenges that pertain to a specific context. They can also be instrumental in identifying the questions that are unanswered or insufficiently answered in the literature, and design primary research around those questions.

Timing/Stage of the Assessment

Desk reviews are particularly useful toward the beginning of the research phase, including to gain an understanding of conflict factors and types, state and nonstate legitimacy and effectiveness and key actors.

Surveys

Description

Experimental, quasi-experimental and non-experimental surveys can provide an overview of the broader patterns in popular perceptions about specific conflict dynamics, such as key actors, grievances, drivers of conflict, conflict resolution mechanisms, etc. Experimental surveys are particularly useful in answering the “why” questions, i.e., helping researchers infer the causes of effects, or the effects of causes. Standard polling data can also be extremely useful in determining target areas and demographics that are particularly susceptible to violence.

Timing/Stage of the Assessment

Quantitative research can be useful for both testing the hypotheses generated by qualitative research on a sample of the population, or for developing testable hypotheses for qualitative research. As such, it can be employed at different stages in a research phase: in the beginning of research for hypotheses generation, or later for hypotheses testing.

Focus Groups/Interviews

Description

Qualitative research approaches commonly include, but are not necessarily limited to, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Such methods provide thick descriptions and narrative data that seek to answer the “how” questions, i.e., they are particularly useful in descriptive analysis, though, if used skillfully, they can also uncover causal relationships. For instance, qualitative research can uncover how and why communities view certain actors as legitimate and interrogate key narratives on conflict dynamics that shed light on linkages between political issues, conflict and social cohesion.

Timing/Stage of the Assessment

Qualitative research may also be useful both for generating hypotheses and for testing hypotheses. For instance, it can be employed to identify the perceived causes of conflict in a descriptive manner. Additionally, it can be used to assess the peacebuilding initiatives that are perceived as most effective.

Key Research Methodologies

Systems Mapping

Description

While qualitative and quantitative research can shed light on national, regional and local conflict dynamics, it is also necessary to consider how conflict factors and actors interact to make up the full system. This can take place by bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders to understand and map local vulnerabilities, risks and opportunities for conflict resolution. By undertaking this process, it is possible to understand how interventions impact the context and the effects certain actions may have on conflict dynamics. This will ensure program design is flexible, conflict-sensitive and participatory.

Timing/Stage of the Assessment

Systems mapping may be useful to understand the following components of the assessment scope:

- Map the conflict system: This method is critical in illustrating the key points of overlap and connection, as well as understanding which factors enable or support conflict.
- Identify key actors and conduct an in-depth actor analysis: A systems mapping can help determine the roles and relationships of conflict and peace actors.
- Identify entry points: To help ensure interventions are conflict-sensitive, this method can determine the ways in which an intervention may be perceived by a community, as well as potential risks.

Stakeholder Analysis/Mapping

Description

Stakeholder analysis is an effective tool for developing a conflict profile of each major stakeholder. It involves listing the parties directly involved, interested and affected. Then the process helps identify the positions, demands and needs of each actor. The process moves on to identify the key issues in the conflict, the sources of power and influence of the party and, finally, an estimate of the willingness of the party to negotiate. Note: To obtain gender-balanced and holistic information, consider using the tool with separate groups of women, men and youth. This might reveal new points of entry for action.⁶

Timing/Stage of the Assessment

A stakeholder analysis is particularly relevant when mapping actors and understanding their motivations, relationships and strategies. In most cases, it is useful to employ stakeholder mapping at the beginning of a project.

⁶ Conflict Analysis Framework.

CONDUCTING THE CONFLICT, GOVERNANCE AND LEGITIMACY ASSESSMENT

This section outlines the three-step process for completing the conflict, governance and legitimacy assessment, based on the research approach and associated methods you have selected. It begins with Step One, analyzing the nature of conflict, then proceeds to Step Two, examining the legitimacy and effectiveness of state and nonstate actors, and concludes with Step Three, identifying entry points for DRG interventions.



I. Step One: Analyze the Nature of Conflict

This step involves examining the contextual, structural and systemic factors that increase susceptibility to conflict. This section will guide the user through identifying the different types of conflict in a society, the factors and triggers that spark conflict and key actors that support, perpetrate or mitigate violence. By the end of it, you will begin to understand the key issues that make up the conflict system in a context.

Determining the nature and scope of violent conflict can be significantly more complex than the task appears at face value. Today, lower-intensity violence has proliferated, and most violent conflict occurs somewhere on a spectrum between civil war and crime, driven by factors ranging from ethnic and sectarian tensions to uneven economic development. The space between war and peace is a dynamic, wide-ranging and complicated environment that is all too often misunderstood and mischaracterized.⁷

Because conflict is such a broad-ranging category, it is well advised to begin programming by mapping and analyzing the specific dynamics of the targeted region or community. Such analyses deepen and contextualize the drivers and operational constraints of emerging and ongoing violent conflicts and can provide insight into where and how development and governance interventions will be most successful.

1.1 Identify the Different Forms of Conflict in a Society

Conflict is nonlinear. Its manifestations vary based on a confluence of available means to wage conflict, grievances, motivations, societal patterns and the capacities of combatants or governments. These manifestations can also refer to a wide spectrum of conflict types. Often, before violent conflict occurs, conflict can manifest itself as identity-based grievances or organized political disputes.

Given the wide variation of violence, intensity and prevalence, conflict is often conceptualized as a cycle. Fragile situations and latent conflict feature high levels of tensions that may escalate into violence but have not yet broken out into a physical confrontation—for example, protests, civil disobedience and targeted incarceration. Signs of increasing tension and possible escalation include threats, hate speech and harassment or violence against

⁷ Schadlow, Nadia. "Peace and War: The Space Between," *War on the Rocks*, 18 Aug. 2014, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/08/peace-and-war-the-space-between/>; Kaldor, Mary. *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era*. 3rd ed., Polity, 2013.

women. During the peak of conflict, harm and bloodshed ensues, culminating in outbreaks of violence that range in severity from acts of terrorism and widespread intercommunal conflict to genocide. The final stage of the conflict cycle is when the conflict has deescalated and the recovery period has been initiated. During this time, post-conflict peacebuilding is essential to addressing long-standing grievances, bolstering structural reform and mitigating the risk of conflict recurrence. Interventions should be tailored based on the context's stage in the conflict cycle; however, this framework is not fully representative of the complexities of conflict. A country context may not always fit neatly into these phases, so it is critical to analyze the history and trends of the conflict system.

In one community, different forms of conflict may coexist and feed each other. Land issues, political competition, violent groups and ideology, inequality, access to resources and drug and arms trafficking may all be part of the same conflict system. The first step to analyzing a conflict system is to identify and consider the sources, history and manifestations of conflict. In so doing, you can determine the exact feature of the conflict system that subsequent interventions will aim to effect.



Illustrative Questions

- What are the key sources of tension and conflict?
 - » Are there disputes over resources (land/water/natural resources) or inequitable distribution of and access to resources?
 - » Are there intergroup (ethnic, religious or other) tensions? Do certain groups feel oppressed and/or the target of violence from other groups and/or the state?
 - » Are there political or economic dynamics that influence people's incentives to be involved (or not) in disputes?
 - » Are there political or economic dynamics that incentivize people to frame conflict in a particular way?
 - » Is there identity-based mobilization, where organized coalitions claim to represent specific groups in a society?
- Are there notable trends in the conflict? (Is it cyclical? Is violence increasing or decreasing? Are there potential flashpoints of disagreements, such as upcoming elections?)
- If there are different conflicts present in a society, is there a hierarchy of conflicts? Which type of conflict do communities have the most exposure to?
- What is the relationship between different types of conflict?
- How is conflict expressed at local and national levels? What is the relationship between them?
- Which types of conflict does the local population believe to be most harmful and significant?
- Are there specific areas where nonstate actors appear to have supplanted the local government as local governance?

- What is the history of conflict? (Societies that have previously experienced violent conflict are more likely to see conflict resurgence of the same or closely related type of conflict.)

1.2 Understand Factors That Drive Conflict

Conflict is fluid and dynamic, so it is critical to understand its underlying root causes as well as the more immediate “triggers.” Root causes include structural factors such as political exclusion, deep societal divisions, perceived legitimacy of institutions, history of violence and intolerance. Triggers are events or circumstances that rapidly change conflict dynamics by accentuating the root causes. Examples of triggers include elections, developments in a peace process, flow of funds or weapons, cultural violence, natural disasters or displacement flows. Having said this, the drivers of conflict can be wide-ranging and do not always fall within the categories outlined above. Assessing the broader context in which the conflict occurs can help the user understand the long-term prospects for durable and effective programming.

There are many potential underlying drivers of conflict, but not all result in active violence. Inclusion is directly correlated to normalizing nonviolent conflict resolution. If citizens perceive state institutions as exclusionary or biased, they are more likely to seek extrajudicial resolution of their problems, both with informal nonstate institutions and within their own familial circles, or seek no resolution at all. Exclusive policies also worsen grievances and undermine perceptions of legitimacy, resulting in increased political tensions.⁸

Corruption, particularly in the realms of law enforcement and justice provision, is another key factor that has the potential to drive intercommunal tensions. States that have uneven enforcement of the law or cultures of bribery may feature citizens seeking dispute resolution outside of formal institutions, sometimes leading to conflict. For example, in Nigeria, cases of bribery between local government officials and foreign companies interested in resource extraction have led to tensions within communities that feel they are being exploited by local officials engaging in corruption.⁹ These examples illustrate the types of conflict drivers that implementers and local researchers should look for when conducting a conflict analysis. Once desk research and data collection has ensued, identifying the key drivers will often surface as recurring themes across the research finding. When exploring this section of the framework, note that in-depth governance assessment factors and key actors will be covered in the second component.



Illustrative Questions

- Does the government have the confidence of the population or is there widespread distrust in government institutions and processes? If the latter, how does it manifest (lack of popular participation in political processes, protest, etc.)?

⁸ O’Neil, Carrie, and Ryan Sheely. “Governance As a Root Cause of Protracted Conflict and Sustainable Peace: Moving from Rhetoric to a New Way of Working.” *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 20 June 2019. <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2019/governance-root-cause-protracted-conflict-and-sustainable-peace-moving-rhetoric-new-way-working>.

⁹ Page, Matthew T. “The Intersection of China’s Commercial Interests and Nigeria’s Conflict Landscape.” *United States Institute of Peace*, Special Report No. 428, Sept. 2018. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/sr428-the-intersection-of-chinas-commercial-interests-and-nigerias-conflict-landscape.pdf>.

- To what extent is trust, or mistrust, evenly distributed across different government institutions and sectors? Why is this the case?
- Do all citizens have equal protection and rights under the law? What formal laws and regulations, and enforcement thereof, influence the conflict? Are there noticeable differences in *de jure* versus *de facto* enjoyment of equality under the law or with exercising of rights?
- Are there isolated incidents of human rights violations against a certain segment of the population or are they part of a broader pattern of repression? Are violations perpetuated by the state and its security apparatus (police, military) and/or considered politically motivated?
 - » When violations occur, do citizens have access to justice or is there a culture of impunity?
- Is economic development unequal, resulting in wide disparities?
- What are the most pressing structural issues? (Economic, social, political, security, justice?)
- Is there widespread corruption among government officials (including, but not limited to, elected officials, political party leaders, the judiciary and security services)?
- Are there real or perceived inequalities among the population with regard to access to education, jobs and other economic opportunities? If so, are these inequalities based on identity or some other factor? How are they addressed by the government?
- What are the gendered norms, roles and dynamics that drive conflict in a community? Are there gendered hierarchies within a society that have enabled conflict? Are there intersectional factors that affect the conflict dynamics?
- How has conflict worsened gender disparities in a community?
- What are the most salient divisions within the society? Are there cleavages around resources, politics, religion, ethnicity, gender, etc.?
- What is the degree of inter- and intra-group community cooperation and tolerance?
- What are the major grievances that lead to or enable conflict, in other words, the main points of dissatisfaction? Who experiences these grievances, and are there local and national differences between the individuals' grievances?
- What informal norms and behaviors drive support for violence? What about for peace and resilience?
- Is there a sense of a common national identity? Is national identity more relevant than other forms of identity, for example, ethnic, linguistic or class-based identity? How do different political identities layer in relation to one another?
- Do independent media and civil society exist and report critically on governance challenges? Is the media polarized and does it contribute to conflict by perpetuating disinformation and promoting intolerance?
- Are there key triggers for the conflict that have impacted its onset or intensity (for example, contested elections, economic decline, humanitarian or natural disasters, etc.)?

1.3 Map the Conflict System and Actors

Violent conflict has a negative impact on human life and development writ large. Violence kills, maims, traumatizes and displaces individuals, with significant follow-on effects on development, political stability and social infrastructure. Beyond the casualties directly caused by armed conflict, conflict can lead to lack of access to basic medical care, clean water and food.¹⁰ Additionally, violent conflicts have major impacts on both physical infrastructure (like roads and schools) and human capital (through deaths, displacement and uncertainty) that have long-term negative implications for a country's development and economic growth. This creates a cyclical pattern of institutional erosion, conflict reoccurrence and persistent violence. These effects are particularly dire for groups that are historically marginalized: women, youth and minorities.

While the broad effects of armed conflict are negative, some groups and individuals benefit from the insecurity and violence. These beneficiaries include suppliers of small arms or weapons, black and gray market entrepreneurs and possibly the political leadership of the state (whether it is the existing regime that has weathered the conflict or a new administration brought to power by violence).

Mapping the conflict system builds on the previous section for understanding the drivers of conflict by understanding the relationships between drivers. Understanding how drivers of conflict work together within an entire conflict system helps the user better understand which stakeholders to engage as well as which drivers interact with whom. Mapping a system can become exceptionally complex, particularly in instances where a driver of conflict for one group is a driver of peace for another. For example, extremist ideologies can be a driver of violent conflict against out-groups, whereas for in-groups it can create unity amongst different communities.

While every conflict is context specific and reflects the particular historical, geographic and logistical dynamics of the place in which it occurs, there are some general trends about *who* is involved in a conflict. Mapping a **conflict system** involves connecting **conflict drivers** to **actors** involved in the conflict. Conflict drivers are distinct, although actors can greatly impact drivers of conflict. Understanding how the different actors exacerbate or mitigate conflict drivers within a system will help interventions to tailor programming to the specifics of a context.

Conflict actors are generally a mix of state and nonstate agents and encompass both violent and nonviolent groups and individuals. Interventions must incorporate and take into account the influence and involvement of such groups or individuals. Without either engaging or neutralizing key actors, any intervention strategy is unlikely to succeed in any meaningful sense. Identifying the main actors can include individuals or groups that have any type of impact on conflict—whether they drive, minimize or resolve it. Relevant actors include those at the international, local, subnational or regional levels, as illustrated on the next page.

¹⁰ "Global Burden of Armed Violence 2015: Every Body Counts." *Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development*, 8 May 2015, <http://www.genevadeclaration.org/measurability/global-burden-of-armed-violence/global-burden-of-armed-violence-2015.html>.



Types of Actors

- State governments: national-level and local-level government of the state in which the conflict occurs (including elected and appointed representatives).
- State actors: state security forces or legal organizations, including the military, judiciary, national and local-level police forces and professional civil servants.
- Armed nonstate actors: rebel groups, militias, paramilitary organizations, local defense forces and criminal groups. While these groups are usually domestic in origin, sometimes foreign nonstate armed groups intervene.
- Other nonstate political actors: opposition parties, political leaders not in power, unions and exiled opposition.
- International and regional organizations, networks and advocacy groups.
- Nongovernmental organizations: international and domestic agencies pursuing social, development, humanitarian or political goals.
- External state actors, such as neighboring countries, donors, allies and adversaries.
- Traditional actors: customary, community and ethnic group leaders.
- Religious leaders and bodies: local religious communities, leaders (priests, imams, pastors, gurus, clerics, etc.), international religious groups and individuals like missionaries.
- Media: international, national and local news organizations, social media and citizen journalism.
- Private sector: local and international businesses.

When mapping out actors involved in a conflict, identify the key actors and the roles they have had in perpetuating conflict or as potential peacebuilders. By examining actors that are heavily involved in mobilizing conflict,¹¹ you can then understand how they are able to gain legitimacy based off tactics that emphasize community grievances. Then, in analyzing legitimacy¹² in the subsequent section, you can also see the connections between how various actors are able to govern and compete with other actors at the subnational level. Thus, it is possible to understand how certain factors, such as legitimacy, can give actors the capacity to play a sizeable role in either exacerbating or mitigating conflict.



Illustrative Questions

- Who stands to gain or lose in the conflict?
- How are the political or economic elites affected by conflict?

¹¹ "Conflict Assessment Framework: Version 2.0." *U.S. Agency for International Development*, June 2012, <http://www.dmeforpeace.org/peaceexchange/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Conflict-Assessment-Framework-Revised-CAF-2.0.pdf>.

¹² With regard to legitimacy, one thing to note is that it can be gained or lost, and that legitimacy does not ultimately mean an actor plays a role in governance. Rather, effective governance can help increase legitimacy and vice versa.

- How are different groups affected by conflict? (This can include youth, women, sexual, ethnic or religious minorities, people with disabilities, among others.)
- What is the relationship between the conflict factors and the broader context? This can include the flow of information, influence and funding.
- What external trends impact the conflict? (A few examples include climate change and climate shocks, trade, transnational criminal networks and funds, resource scarcity, etc.)
- Are there gendered differences in who benefits from conflict, either economically, politically or socially, in the short and long term?
- To what extent is conflict impacted by cross-border issues such as refugee flows, illicit trafficking and spillover violence?
- Who are the primary participants (directly engaged) in the production of violent conflict?
- Who are the secondary participants (indirectly engaged) in the conflict?
- Who are the passive fence-sitters in the conflict?
- What are the primary interests of these actors? Can they be incentivized toward peaceful dispute resolution?
- What is their respective operational capacity? How are they financed/resourced? Who/where is their base of supporters? What are the most pressing constraints on their capacities?
- What are the relationships between these actors? How are they connected? Where do their interests converge and diverge?
- Who are the primary targets of conflict?
- How have gendered norms and dynamics influenced actor roles and behavior in a conflict?
- Which actors have the capacity and will to oppose violence and promote peace and stability? How are they connected to other stakeholders? What is their level of influence and support? What is their capacity to prevent or mitigate violent conflict?
- Which actors can broadly influence the community or population around them?

By the end of this step, you will begin to understand the key issues that make up the conflict system in a context. With this examination, you can then move to deepening your analysis of key state and nonstate actors in Step Two.



II. Step Two: Assess the Effectiveness and Legitimacy of Key Institutions and Actors

By this point in the analysis, you have a firm understanding of the conflict system. In this step, you will build on analysis from Step One by identifying and analyzing the levels of legitimacy and effectiveness of key actors that can mobilize people toward or away from

conflict. By the end, you will understand which governmental and nongovernmental actors and systems have legitimacy.¹³

War is often portrayed as a period when no governance occurs—a lawless anarchy that consumes everything around it. In reality, a great deal of ordinary living occurs, even in active conflict zones. Just as routine activities continue, so too does a significant amount of governance. However, in conflict-affected settings, *who* is governing changes. The spectrum of governance actors expands as entrepreneurial groups seek to fill the power vacuum created by government reorientation toward conflict management. Since formal authority is usually weak or nonexistent during civil war, it is replaced by informal institutions either tacitly or explicitly negotiated by warring groups.¹⁴ How much governance is dispersed, however, depends greatly on the type of conflict the state is experiencing. This has significant implications for outside intervenors, as successful programing in one conflict context may not translate well to another. However, while governance may be occurring outside of formal institutions, understanding the broader conflict landscape is a prerequisite to identifying the systems and actors that govern conflict-affected contexts.

2.1 Assess the Effectiveness and Legitimacy of State Institutions and Actors

Once key actors have been identified, it is necessary to assess the quality and efficacy of state institutions and actors. Where states fail to meet the expectations of their citizens, it results in a breakdown in trust and brings latent grievances to the surface.¹⁵ This creates an opening for informal, nonstate actors to fill the governance vacuum and provide services, grievance redress and avenues for political expression. In some instances, weak state capacity involves deficient funding and human capital to deliver governance goods. In others, state institutions persecute their citizens and violate human rights. Predatory or bad governance hinges on exclusion, discrimination and corruption. It can soften the ground for violent conflict to pervade.

In assessing key state actors, it may be relevant to focus on the following core state and political institutions depending on their relevance in the conflict context: national, regional and local governments, security forces, judicial officials, the legislative branch and ruling and opposition party elites.¹⁶

State Legitimacy

Legitimacy, or legitimate governance, is the idea that the actors charged with policymaking are widely perceived as having the appropriate rights and authorities to make decisions on behalf of the collective community. Legitimacy is a multifaceted concept. Its meaning is shaped by the context in which it is embedded. Legitimacy can be understood as a moral

¹³ IRI has identified effectiveness and legitimacy as key components based on a review of resources on the issue. The USAID Alert List also includes effectiveness and legitimacy as core issues related to state performance. USAID includes indicators related to development, as well as instability and violence, democracy, human rights and governance. "Conflict Assessment Framework: Version 2.0." USAID, June 2012. <http://www.dmeforpeace.org/peaceexchange/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Conflict-Assessment-Framework-Revised-CAF-2.0.pdf>.

¹⁴ Kasfir, Nelson, et al. "Introduction: Armed Groups and Multi-layered Governance, Civil Wars." *Civil Wars*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2017, pp. 257–278. Taylor & Francis Online, DOI: 10.1080/13698249.2017.1419611.

¹⁵ "Conflict Assessment Framework: Version 2.0." USAID, June 2012. <http://www.dmeforpeace.org/peaceexchange/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Conflict-Assessment-Framework-Revised-CAF-2.0.pdf>.

¹⁶ While political parties are nonstate actors, they have been included in this section due to their role as formal institutions in a democratic society, in contrast with traditional or customary leaders and the like.

right to govern.¹⁷ It generally refers to the acceptance of a regime as “appropriate” by its population.¹⁸ The World Bank’s *World Development Report* leans toward a normative framing of legitimacy. It defines legitimacy as a “broad-based belief that social, economic, or political arrangements and outcomes are proper and just.”¹⁹ State legitimacy is anchored in trust between the state and the citizens. State and nonstate actors build and nurture trust by constructing cross-cutting, overlapping and inclusive group identities and by developing institutions and practices that are fair and impartial.²⁰

Together, legitimacy and governance are cyclical inputs that serve to reinforce each other—as actors govern effectively, they are seen as more legitimate, which leads to more opportunities to increase state capacity and garner still more legitimacy. A lack of legitimacy leads to resistance, which hinders the enactment and implementation of policies and practices.²¹ Often, legitimacy is closely tied to inclusion: the incorporation of groups (or representatives of groups) beyond traditional elites into political processes broadens perceptions of legitimacy, encourages durability of institutions and engenders more effective governance.



Metrics

Legitimacy is measured across three main sources: process (input) legitimacy, performance (output) legitimacy and shared beliefs (feelings of citizenship or community).²²

- Process legitimacy refers to the mechanisms and procedures that enable the enactment of politics and decisions. This category is also relevant in determining the level of citizen participation in decision-making and accountability.
- Performance legitimacy primarily entails the ability of a governance actor to deliver services, resolve disputes, provide protection and administer justice.
- Shared beliefs or charismatic legitimacy refer to whether people identify with the political order that governs them. It can be linked to the personality or the historical, religious or cultural claims of a leader.



Illustrative Questions

The following questions encapsulate issues concerned with process, performance and charismatic legitimacy. Some of these components may have already been captured as part of the first step in analyzing the nature of conflict.

¹⁷ Wedeen, Lisa. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. University of Chicago Press, 2015.

¹⁸ Brinkerhoff, Derek W. *Capacity Development in Fragile States*, Discussion Paper 58D, European Centre for Development Policy Management, Maastricht, 2007.

¹⁹ *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development*. World Bank, 2011, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/4389>.

²⁰ Börzel, Tanja A., and Thomas Risse. “Dysfunctional State Institutions, Trust, and Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood.” *Regulation & Governance*, vol. 10, no. 2, June 2016, pp. 149–160. *Wiley Online Library*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12100>.

²¹ Eickhoff, Karoline, and Luise K. Müller. *Conflict Prevention and the Legitimacy of Governance Actors*. Freie Universität Berlin, 2017, <https://refubium.fu-berlin.de/handle/fub188/21931>.

²² Dagher, Ruby. “Legitimacy and Post-Conflict State-Building: the Undervalued Role of Performance Legitimacy.” *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 18, no. 2, 27 Mar. 2018, pp. 85–111. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2018.1447860>.

- Do subnational and national institutions represent certain groups' interests, like elites, or are views across all segments equitably represented? Is power concentrated within the central government or among the ruling elite, or are there institutions and processes to ensure countrywide representation and inclusion in decision-making and political processes?
- Do people share a national identity that aligns with the state narrative? What is the basis for state actors' authority and influence?
- Are various communities' views included in government decision-making?
- Does the population trust and respect government actors and actions?
- Are there gendered differences in community perception of the legitimacy of state actors?
- Does the population trust or hold confidence in politics and governing structures to deliver on community outcomes? Are processes standardized and procedures for political participation and decision-making clear? Do they operate as they are intended to under the law?
 - » Does the population believe that the state is to blame for poor political and economic conditions or lack of access to services?
- How does the state protect its population and maintain security?
- Does the state effectively resolve disputes and provide services? Do all segments of the population have equal access to public services?
- Does the state respect and protect the human rights of its population?
 - » Are particular segments of the population subject to large-scale violence, abuse or discrimination?
- Are institutions transparent and accountable to the population? Is there public debate/consultation on matters of importance to the country?

State Effectiveness and Commitment

In addition to considering whether state actors are deemed legitimate, assess whether state actors effectively fulfill their mandates and have the administrative capacity to carry out their responsibilities. Although closely intertwined, legitimacy and effectiveness are distinct areas of analysis. State performance can be measured across several dimensions: economic, social, political and security.²³

This section offers ways to analyze state effectiveness that is centered on the bureaucracy, policy platforms and institutions of governments. This involves understanding whether the government meets the public's expectations and utilizes its resources to achieve policy outcomes.²⁴ This section also covers assessing a state's "commitment" to peace and

²³ "Conflict Assessment Framework: Version 2.0." USAID, June 2012.

²⁴ *The USAID Fragile States Assessment Framework*. USAID, Draft Prepared for Use at Burundi Workshop, 27-28 July, 2005, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnady528.pdf.

stabilization in accordance with USAID's Journey to Self-Reliance.²⁵ To that end, it is key to understanding how laws, policies and formal structures support stability.



Illustrative Questions

- Do stable, clear and consistent electoral processes exist?
- How capable is the state of collecting taxes and managing expenditures?
- Are resources being utilized in alignment with citizens' priorities?
- Does the state have access to resources, skills and expertise to effectively carry out its responsibilities?
- How capable is the state in delivering services and enforcing laws?²⁶
- How responsive is the government to the community? Is the government constrained by public opinion? Can citizens access government representatives and officers? Note that this will vary significantly at the subnational level and should be assessed in accordance with localized dynamics.
- Who can participate in the political decision-making process? Do the formal rules of participation match informal customs or lived realities?
- Are women, ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, youth and people with disabilities able to influence decision-making in a community? Does the state respond to the needs of these groups?
- Are policymakers and government institutions responsive to their constituents? Does the state have necessary oversight mechanisms—both informally and formally? If policymakers do not fulfill promises or obligations, can they be held accountable or removed through a democratic process?
- Is power centralized through one dominant leader or group, or are other interests represented through state forums?
- Are there sufficient checks and balances across branches of government?
- What are the priorities of the state, and do they align with public interests? Do government policy actions support or impede conflict mitigation and stabilization?

2.2 Assess the Legitimacy and Effectiveness of Nonstate Actors

By analyzing state institutions in the previous section, you are able to determine whether the state is unable or unwilling to govern, and, by extension, whether there are incentives for informal actors to fill the power vacuum. In such circumstances, nonstate actors may advance their own agendas, provide services or maintain security. Informal institutions are

²⁵ USAID Country Roadmap Portal. U.S. Agency for International Development, <https://selfreliance.usaid.gov/#tab-about>.

²⁶ Dang, Thi Kim Phung, et al. "A Framework for Assessing Governance Capacity: An Illustration from Vietnam's Forestry Reforms." *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, vol. 24, no. 6, pp. 1154-1174, 11 Aug. 2015. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263774X15598325>.

not officially established or codified, but they are widely accepted as legitimate and function to shape or constrain behavior much in the same way that formal institutions do.²⁷

This step involves determining the type, level of legitimacy and extent to which nonstate actors exercise governing authority. In order to do so, build on the previous analysis to identify a preliminary list of actors that could be viewed as legitimate within the given context. An overview of potential prevalent nonstate actors is as follows. It is not exhaustive and will vary significantly depending on the context.

- Religious leaders or groups
- Tribal or customary leaders
- International and local civil society
- Youth groups
- Nonstate armed groups like terrorists, militants, gangs and militias
- Private sector actors
- Women's groups

Nonstate Legitimacy

As part of the analysis, understand the level and sources of an actor's legitimacy. The same definition and conceptual grounding as outlined above under the state legitimacy section apply. However, assessing the legitimacy of nonstate actors will vary from state legitimacy. Nonstate actors may be regarded as legitimate for a range of factors, including their ability to provide services, represent a particular group or influence key stakeholders.



Illustrative Questions

The following questions encapsulate issues concerned with process, performance and charismatic legitimacy.

- Outside of the state, whom do people approach to resolve their disputes? Specifically, whom do they approach for disputes regarding petty crime (theft, robbery)? How about disputes regarding their right to property, land and water? How about disputes regarding serious or violent crimes (assault, murder, kidnapping, breach of social norms)?
- To what extent is the nonstate actor trusted and respected by the population?
- Do nonstate actors help expand access to basic goods and services?
- Through which actors does the population receive essential information?
- Does the population respect such actors' decisions and actions?

²⁷ Bagayoko, Nigale, et al. "Hybrid Security Governance in Africa: Rethinking the Foundations of Security, Justice and Legitimate Public Authority." *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 1-32, 8 Mar. 2016. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2016.1136137>.

- Does the population have confidence in the ability of a nonstate actor to resolve community issues?
- To what extent does the population rely on nonstate actors to provide representation for community views?
- Do nonstate actors offer reliable processes to respond to community issues?
- Are there gendered differences in community perception of the legitimacy of nonstate actors?
- What is the level of confidence that people have in the ability of these actors to resolve their disputes fairly and transparently?
- Does the nonstate actor offer protection from violence?
- Does the nonstate actor protect and advocate for the human rights of certain groups?
- Is the nonstate actor held accountable by the population?
- What is the basis for the nonstate actor's political agenda and influence?
- What customs or norms drive support for this actor? Do these customs facilitate or impede conflict?

Because legitimacy varies across and within countries, it is important to identify what the local population understands to be legitimate. Some may prioritize effectiveness, while others may identify inclusion and representation as the most important factors which lead to legitimacy.²⁸ To understand local variation, it is critical to interrogate sources of legitimacy further based on public attitudes and perceptions.

Nonstate Effectiveness and Commitment

As with government capacity and commitment, it is important to understand whether nonstate actors have access to the resources and capabilities necessary to govern, as well as the degree to which the actor is committed to peace and conflict mitigation. This step also involves assessing the extent to which the actor can translate their capabilities into political outcomes.



Illustrative Questions

- What is the level of access different groups have to nonstate actors? Are there ways for the population to engage with the nonstate actors on community issues?
- Do clear and consistent mechanisms exist to influence the policies or actions of the nonstate actor? Can the population provide oversight or dissent to the actor's decisions?
- Does the nonstate actor receive resources from the community through taxes, bribes or human capital?

²⁸ Eickhoff, Karoline, and Luise K. Mueller. "Conflict Prevention and the Legitimacy of Governance Actors." *Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood*, SFB-Governance Working Paper Series, no. 72, Sept. 2017. https://www.sfb-governance.de/publikationen/sfb-700-working_papers/wp72/SFB-Governance-Working-Paper-72.pdf.

- What are the goals and political interests of the nonstate actor?
- Are nonstate actors' resources being utilized in alignment with citizens' priorities?
- Do people consider nonstate actors to be inclusive, or are they known to favor one identity group over another? Does the actor reinforce barriers and inequality? Are there opportunities to guide this actor toward inclusion?
- Are women's groups, or groups that represent marginalized populations, able to influence decision-making in a community? Do nonstate actors respond to the needs of these groups?
- Does the actor have access to resources and skills to effectively carry out its agenda?
- What tactics does the nonstate actor use to resolve disputes and conflict? Are there gaps in such capacity?
- How satisfied is the population with provision of services by nonstate actors?
- Can citizens access and influence nonstate actors?
- In what ways does the nonstate actor represent the population?
- Does the nonstate actor support or impede conflict mitigation and stabilization? In what circumstances?
- How well do informal and formal institutions complement or undermine each other, in terms of service delivery, security and dispute resolution?
- Is there a role for the nonstate actor in the formal state system?

2.3 Conduct an In-Depth Actor Analysis

Once the legitimacy and capacity of key actors has been assessed, it is critical to understand their roles, motivations and interests in order to determine the best method of engagement. This involves assessing their role in either driving, enabling or mitigating conflict. It also includes understanding what their interests or grievances are, how they mobilize interests or grievances to perpetuate conflict and how they were able to gain legitimacy and play a role in local governance.

To understand the *interests* of an actor, there are several factors that can be analyzed:

- Political affiliations, associations and orientations;
- Religious or ideological beliefs;
- Historical narratives, often ones that perpetuate a sense of grievance; and
- Motivations stemming from concerns, goals, hopes and fears.

When an actor's interests are identified it is then critical to understand which *strategies* they employ to further their interests. Interests often have concrete goals; for many actors, these goals are widely acknowledged and stated at the outset of a conflict. However, for some actors these goals are less concrete and rooted in underlying issues that are more difficult to analyze. For an analysis of the strategies employed to drive, enable or perpetuate conflict, there are some key questions to consider:

- What are some of the overarching goals associated with the interests of the actor?
- What strategies or methods does the actor use to further their interests or goals that have been identified?
- Are these strategies employed through formal or nonformal means? For example, are these strategies institutionalized through legal channels or through informal, community or cultural agendas?
- Does the actor have a tendency toward either violent or nonviolent means of achieving their goals?
- Are there patterns with their strategies toward achieving their goals?

After identifying the actor's interests and strategies, it is then critical to assess the resources and influence of the actor. These are the components which allow actors to achieve their goals and interests. This can be particularly useful when trying to compare actors within a conflict, and which actors have the most impact in a context. The level of influence can impact an actor's future capacity to mobilize around their interests, continue to build upon their strategies and build strategic relationships. The following factors are critical to assess:

- Resources, including both financial and natural;
- Military capabilities or the ability to arm/form a militia;
- Territorial control and whether or not they have access to a potential territorial safe haven;
- Internal dynamics, including strength of leadership, cohesiveness, networks, alliances and support base.

Lastly, within the concept of analyzing networks, alliances and support bases, to understand actor legitimacy it is necessary to gain an understanding of the *relationships* that support an actor's interests, goals, strategies and capacities. For example:

- Who does the actor interact with within the context of this conflict? This can be conceptualized by examining local, regional, national and international levels of actors and their relationships with the actor you are analyzing.
- Are these relationships strategic, and if so, why are they strategic for this actor?
- Which actors/groups bolster legitimacy of this actor? For example, which political elites are aligned with this actor? Which grassroots actors are aligned with this actor?
- Which groups are in opposition to this actor?
- Does the actor offer representation of a particular group? Which groups and for what reasons?

Once the interests, strategies, influence and relationships have been identified, conclusions can be drawn regarding which method of engagement or mitigation measures may be most appropriate. In so doing, it is possible to understand an actor's role in the conflict and how their interests and influence can be leveraged or neutralized to help stabilize conflict.

Actor Mapping Methods

Mapping and analyzing actors is particularly challenging due to fluid group structures, relationships and motivations. While the research methods outlined above, such as quantitative and qualitative research, may help uncover the motivations and strategies of actors, there are several additional methods that could be useful. Such approaches are detailed below.

- **Stakeholder Mapping:** This methodology helps to identify the interests and capacities of stakeholders within a conflict. This includes identifying the stakeholders involved (individuals, groups, institutions), their vested interests in the conflict, their capacities and resources and how they mobilize and communicate.²⁹ When mapping out stakeholders, it is useful to categorize them as primary or secondary stakeholders.
- **Stakeholder Analysis:** Similar to stakeholder mapping, stakeholder analysis is a process that seeks to understand the interests of actors within a context. However, this methodology involves a heavy analytical component wherein implementers gather and then analyze qualitative information in order to better understand how to take actors into account for programming in conflict-affected contexts. The analysis process should involve breaking down stakeholder involvement in the conflict, their interests related to the conflict, their position within the conflict-affected context, their relationships with other stakeholders and their ability to mitigate conflict. This can help determine which actors to engage, and through which types of programming.³⁰
- **Dividers and Connectors:** Identifying dividers and connectors can help the user understand which actors perpetuate or mitigate conflict.³¹ Dividers are actors in a conflict that pit people against each other, and connectors are those that bring together people across subgroups.³² Actors are divided or connected by elements, and interact with individuals, groups or institutions to create or mitigate conflict. Once identified, implementers can then point out which connectors to support and which dividers to mitigate.³³
- **System Mapping:** This method helps identify actors by their associated interactions and connections with one another in a system-based approach. Looking at actors through a “system-based lens” helps the user understand how relationships are interconnected and gives a comprehensive view of how different actors interact to produce outcomes. This is particularly relevant for identifying actors in conflict settings as it helps to point to which actors work together or against each other. This method also helps identify intervention points within relationships and interactions in a conflict system.³⁴

²⁹ *How to Implement Stakeholder Mapping into the Programmatic Approach of the Climate Investment Funds*. Climate Investment Funds, World Bank Group. 2018. https://www.climateinvestmentfunds.org/sites/cif_enc/files/knowledge-documents/stakeholder_mapping_guideline_revised.pdf.

³⁰ Schmeer, Kammi. *Stakeholder Analysis Guidelines*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/workforcealliance/knowledge/toolkit/33.pdf>.

³¹ *From Principle to Practice: A User's Guide to Do No Harm*. Principle to Practice. <http://www.principletopractice.org/from-principle-to-practice/understanding-dividers-and-connectors/>.

³² “Corporate Engagement Project: Dividers and Connectors.” *CDA Collaborative Learning Projects*, Feb. 2003, <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Dividers-and-Connectors.pdf>.

³³ *From Principle to Practice*.

³⁴ Gopal, Srikanth “Srik,” and Tiffany Clarke. “System Mapping: A Guide to Developing Actor Maps.” *The Intersector Project*, 2015. <http://intersector.com/resource/system-mapping-a-guide-to-developing-actor-maps/>.

By the end of Step Two, you should be able to understand which governmental and nongovernmental actors and systems have legitimacy. With this analysis, you can then move to developing DRG policies and programs that help bolster locally legitimate actors and systems to manage conflict.



III. Step Three: Understand the Entry Points for DRG Interventions

By this point in the assessment, you should have a firm understanding of locally legitimate systems and conflict dynamics. In Step Three, you will build on this analysis to identify opportunities for intervention and to formulate responsive DRG policies and programs. It involves identifying areas of resiliency and opportunities for peace, mapping existing responses and understanding the risks or consequences of potential interventions. By the end of this step, you will understand effective ways to address conflict dynamics as well as mitigate the potential unintended consequences.

A critical component is to lay out a goal or theory of change for the DRG intervention, as goals can vary from local to national level, and emphasize many different aspects, such as anti-corruption, subnational governance and social cohesion. Building on the analysis of locally legitimate actors, determine the ideal method of engagement in order to maximize its stabilization potential and mitigate unintended consequences. There are many risks to partnering with or involving some informal or nonstate actors depending on their status in the community. For example, it may risk undermining state legitimacy and community capacity or reinforcing existing inequalities. Thus, prior to walking through the following questions, identifying an overarching goal the DRG intervention is seeking to achieve will help to narrow down the scope and make the entry points more specific to the desired outcomes.



Illustrative Questions

- What existing areas of cooperation among different groups and communities can be built on? What barriers prevent cooperation and how can they be reduced?
- What do the local population view as practical solutions to addressing social tensions and violent conflict?
 - » Which efforts were effective that can be built on, and which initiatives fell short and should be avoided?
- How effective are existing channels for conflict resolution? How can undermining these avenues be avoided? Do they need additional support? What, if anything, is missing?
- What interventions have been effective toward democracy and governance objectives in the past that could be scaled?
- What is the current landscape of responses, and which conflict factor do each of these initiatives seek to address? Are there any factors that are not currently being addressed in existing efforts? It is critical that these questions are analyzed considering all donors, including governments, NGOs and community organizations within the landscape.
- Which focus area is currently saturated with programs?

- How can a new intervention leverage partners to supplement gaps in networks or expertise?
- What needs to change at the local/subnational/national/regional level to overcome conflict?
- What can projects do to support actors promoting peace? Are any agents of peace currently being sidelined or fail to receive the appropriate level of support?
- What are the gendered norms, roles and dynamics that need to be changed to overcome conflict? What are the gendered grievances and effects of conflict that need to be addressed to enable peace or build resilience?
- Is there a risk that the project will negatively impact conflict dynamics? If so, how? Can this risk be managed/mitigated?
- Will the project unintentionally support and/or legitimize actors engaging in or promoting violence?
- How can a project be designed to be sustainable: are there certain structures the project can link to, or tools that can support program participants beyond the life of a project?

To aid in this project design effort, it may also be useful to refer to evidence-based lessons on the myriad types of interventions. Consider consulting IRI's *Field Guide for Democracy and Governance Programming in Conflict-Affected Contexts*.

CONCLUSION

This framework provides broad guidance for the key components of a conflict assessment. A sound analysis will include a wide spectrum of conflict, governance and legitimacy factors: structural, attitudinal and behavioral dimensions.³⁵ Critically, intervenors must understand deeply entrenched and interwoven conflict and legitimacy dynamics in fragile or violent states. Solutions will most likely be multifaceted, long-term and incremental.

To capture key conflict trends, utilize the framework throughout the project cycle, with regular updates to reflect changing conflict dynamics. As the conflict evolves, programming designed to address drivers of conflict must evolve as well. Regular updates of the conflict, governance and legitimacy assessment ensure that the democracy and governance intervention remains relevant, responsive and rooted in local needs.

³⁵ Conflict Analysis Framework.

ANNEX 1: REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The *Conflict, Governance and Legitimacy Assessment Framework* draws on existing resources from leading development agencies and practitioners. For additional information on developing and conducting a conflict assessment, please consult the following resources:

Conducting a Conflict and Development Analysis. United Nations Development Group, Feb. 2016, https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/UNDP_CDA-Report_v1.3-final-opt-low.pdf.

Conflict Analysis Framework: Field Guidelines and Procedures. Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, Nov. 2017, [https://www.gppac.net/files/2018-11/GPPAC%20CAFGuide Interactive%20version febr2018 .pdf](https://www.gppac.net/files/2018-11/GPPAC%20CAFGuide%20Interactive%20version%20febr2018.pdf).

Conflict Assessment Framework: Version 2.0. United States Agency for International Development, June 2012, <http://www.dmeforpeace.org/peaceexchange/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Conflict-Assessment-Framework-Revised-CAF-2.0.pdf>.

Conflict Assessment Framework Manual. Fund for Peace, 2014, <https://fundforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/cfsir1418-castmanual2014-english-03a.pdf>.

Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability. United Kingdom Stabilisation Unit, June 2017, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765448/JACS_Guidance_Note.pdf.

Manual for Conflict Analysis. Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Jan. 2006, <https://publikationer.sida.se/contentassets/ebb5fd5f69d44fe7bf32f2238249483f/14378.pdf>.

The Stability Assessment Framework: Designing Integrated Responses for Security, Governance and Development. Clingendael Institute for the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005, https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20050200_cru_paper_stability.pdf.

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