

POLICY ON POSITIVE CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

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Together with our 27 member organisations, the Olof Palme International Center (the Palme Center) constitute the cornerstone of the Swedish labour movement's international work. Collectively we represent more than a century of experience in promoting women's rights, civic engagement, democratisation and poverty reduction, in Sweden but also internationally through collaborations, alliances and networks.

The following policy on positive conflict sensitivity is meant to provide a definition and be a tool to be implemented and mainstreamed to support Palme Centre's work for democracy, human rights and peace with the aim to avoid the possible negative impact of our work and increase its positive effects and practice.

This policy is defined within the wider context of conflict, theory of change and development in which the Palme Center is operating as well as the Palme Center approach and strategy.

INTRODUCTION

The Palme Centre's work for progressive social change is about shifting a variety of roots of social conflict such as poverty, inequality, unmet basic needs, social injustices and grievances, marginalisation and segregation, unfair distribution of natural resources, human rights abuses, and lack of freedoms, authoritarianism and corruption. This work is basically guided by a rights-based approach as well as by values of democracy and solidarity. We strongly believe that not only democracy and human rights will be strengthened by facing these factors of conflicts but also peace and stability. Peaceful collective civic actions and democratic organisations, education, training and capacity building are the main empowerment tools used by the Palme Centre in this process.

Although our civic and political engagement is meant to create positive results for the beneficiaries through addressing the above-mentioned factors of conflicts, it may render unintended harm if, for example, it contributes to deepening divisions between communities in the society, worsening relationships between people or creating negative attitudes among social groups. This harm, if it occurs, may also lead to increased feelings of threats to human security and thus to destabilisation and further conflicts.

One example of such harm is if our development aid is provided solely to partners internal to one social group in society without providing a clear conflict sensitive framework that stipulates that the activities that those partners will implement are inclusive, non-discriminatory, non-violent and adapt to the principle of peaceful social coexistence with other social groups and the society at large. A negative impact of the development aid may result in distorted social trust and bridges within the larger society. In a conflict-filled context this risk can increase negative stereotypes, hatred, polarisation and dehumanisation of the other.

Negative effects of development aid on social conflict are particularly feasible in our contemporary world where religious, ethnic, racial, territorial, and cultural and language divisions are systematically cultivated and politicised by various elites to reach particularistic aims and exclusive benefits. This devastates the many factual bonds that connect people, creating fragile communities and states and paving the way for tensions and destructive violent conflicts. The lack of sensitivity and/or insensitive treatment of divisive issues within the course of development partnerships can, thus, undermine the civic engagement for democracy, peace, human security and human rights. Therefore, it is of great importance that a conflict sensitivity perspective permeates the Palme Centre's development aid and operations with the aim to minimise the negative consequences of the conflict and promote its positive effects.

CONFLICT AND THE PALME CENTER'S THEORY OF CHANGE

Palme Center believes that the work for change takes place in an environment that is often conflict-filled. Conflict occurs in human relationships and therefore it is an integral feature of human existence even in times of peace. Conflict may occur at personal, interpersonal, inter-group, intra-group, inter-organisation and intra-organisation as well as at international levels. Conflict occurs when two or more parties believe that their concerns, interests, values, needs and structures are incompatible. Conflict parties may take action that damages other parties' ability to pursue their goals. If unaddressed and unresolved, conflicts may grow, becoming increasingly destructive, hostile and harmful for all involved and even for many non-involved and already vulnerable people. The recurrence of violence and civil wars is enormously dangerous to democracy and well-being. It is in relationships that a conflict is managed, resolved or transformed. Given it can be handled peacefully and constructively, conflict is an essential vehicle for social change and transformation.

CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

The concept of conflict sensitivity in relation to development and humanitarian aid has been highlighted since the late 1990s. Today, increasing number of donors, state agencies and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) recognise the conflict exacerbation risk associated with aid and development support. Moreover, international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and others have made clear recommendations and guidance to scrutinise development aid through conflict sensitive lens, code of conduct and to adapt aid to the contexts of conflict and post-conflict, human insecurity and state fragility. Many of the INGOs are increasingly involved in developing standards and tools to deal with this risk. The bulk of donors, agencies and INGOs are dealing with the above-mentioned issue through focusing on managing conflict sensitivity.

Applying the conflict sensitivity approach in the Palme Centre's work means basically understanding the relational framework in which the Palme Centre's programs and projects operate, interact and impact with the aim to avoid creating negative impact. Thus, conflict sensitivity approach applies to all contexts, regardless of the level of tensions and violence. Hence, it is important to ensure that the Palme Centre's development programming is sensitive to conflict factors. A good tool for conflict sensitising the projects and programs is the "Do No Harm"¹ approach i.e. analysing dividers and connectors which helps bringing an understanding

¹ See instructions for Do No Harm "Dividers and Connectors Analysis" in the Palme Center's Concise Guide for Conflict Analysis Tools.

of the conflict context, by identifying factors that bring people together (connectors) and factors that push people apart (dividers).

The Palme Center operations are built on crucial principles that constitute the foundation of conflict sensitivity namely inclusiveness, non-violence, non-discrimination and peace. However, the Palme Center has no explicit framework for avoiding the possible negative impact of development aid on conflict. Moreover, there is also a need not only for avoiding negative impact on of the Palme Centre's partnerships on conflict but also to actively link the Palme Centre's theory of change through organisation and empowerment to peace and human security as well as to mainstream this in its overall operations and practice.

OUR APPROACH: POSITIVE CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

The bulk of the international donors, agencies and INGOs have been steadily moving from conflict-blind to conflict-sensitive development and humanitarian aid. Working on "conflict sensitivity" has meant a specific focus on avoiding the negative impact of the development programs and projects. This is a positive development. However, the link between conflict sensitised development aid and peace building is still quite weak. Avoidance of unintended harm on conflict is a half way to actively linking the partnership for democracy and human rights to peace and human security. The Palme Center strives to get beyond this limitation by advocating a more encompassing principle of "positive conflict sensitivity" which means a broader focus not merely on avoiding negative effects of the development partnership on conflict but maximising its positive impact on peace and human security. Although conflict sensitivity in development aid does not imply working specifically for peace, it has nevertheless an important implication on the Palme Centre's mission for democracy, human rights and peace.

Applying positive conflict sensitivity aims at creating opportunities for positive side-effects by strengthening our own and partner's capability to reduce sources of violence and insecurity, social tensions, hatred and extremism. Our work for social change is not limited to improving democracy and human rights but also entails cultivating peace and human security. Human security is about people living peaceful life free from threats and fears of violence and all sources of insecurity including poverty and diseases. Therefore, our work involves also transforming the societal framework from schism, antagonism, social polarisation and split into acceptance, tolerance, respect and peaceful coexistence. Positive conflict sensitivity is more than merely conflict sensitivity since pursuing "positive conflict sensitivity" allows the Palme Center to simultaneously support the process of democracy with processes of social change and conflict resolution in a creative way making the Palme Center not only a democracy and human rights activist but also a political peace activist.

OUR VISION

The overall goal of the Palme Center is "a world of peaceful societies founded on the ideals of democracy and equality of all people". This vision of peace and human security, democracy and equality sets the direction for the operations and makes long-term efforts to strengthen these values and their actual implementation in the world. Sustainable frameworks and platforms for conflict resolution, dialog and communication especially with respect to viable democratic institutions constitute an organic part of the Palme Centre's vision. In fact, the Palme Centre's core activity to organise and empower people for change is about developing a viable set of institutions and rules to manage social conflicts without recourse to violence.

OUR PRINCIPLES

The Palme Center is committed to principles of positive conflict sensitivity that apply to all projects and programs irrespective of the context and regardless of the level of stability or tension and violence. These principles include:

- 1) Inclusion, openness and non-discrimination. We conduct activities that are inclusive and open to activists from across the social divide irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion etc. Inclusion, openness and non-discrimination ensure that positive change is achieved through engaging all people across groups, stressing the significance of across-group political and socioeconomic joint activities above religious, ethnic nationalistic, sectarian and other identity differences. The Palme Center is committed to the principle that diverse participation is a crucial success factor for social change.
- 2) Non-violence. We practise solely peaceful ways of action and dialogue in our work for lifting society from poverty, repression, inequality, power abuse, corruption and violence and other sources of human insecurity. Non-violence is the only method for conflict resolution that the Palme Center recognises.
- 3) Peaceful coexistence. We promote peaceful coexistence between individuals, social groups and communities through overcoming of stereotypes, enemy images, polarisation, extremism, hatred and antagonism. Peaceful coexistence ensures that working for change entails respect and dignity to all, separating issues from persons.

These principles of positive conflict sensitivity form an integral part of the Palme Center's core values.

OUR METHODS

Principles of positive conflict sensitivity are acquired, integrated and mainstreamed at the Palme Center as follows:

Systematic understanding of the context from a conflict sensitive perspective with respect to the three principles of inclusion, non-violence and peaceful coexistence on project and program levels.

Project and program applications should address the political, socioeconomic, institutional and conflictual factors that can positively and negatively impact on the projects and programs and vice versa. The Palme Center should always liaise with partners and other progressive stakeholders to gain greater understanding of the relevant context factors as well as conflict issues and actors.

- The knowledge gained from the conflict sensitive context understanding should inform the project and program applications, plans, monitoring, reports and evaluation.
- The understanding of the context should also ensure that the Palme Centre's development programming is sensitive to conflict factors in especially areas characterised by violent conflict or post-conflict.
- Principles of positive conflict sensitivity are accounted for in the project and program manager's handbooks as well as in basic instructions for working with these principles.

- Principles of positive conflict sensitivity are not a one-off activity but values that should be reflected throughout the Palme Centre's operations, including administration, communication, hiring of staff and consultant procurements.
- The program-related collaboration and learning activities including network meetings, trainings and study visits that can be utilised as an opportunity to actively counteract social polarisation, antagonism, hatred, extremism and exclusion and to strengthen and encourage relationships and cooperation across divisions and groups.
- In specific cases when the Palme Center is working directly on conflict, reconciliation, dialogue and peace and/or being called by local actors and accept to the role of a third party mediator to the conflict, a detailed conflict analysis is a must. A crucial aim of the conflict analysis in these cases is to gain a systematic overview that helps building a constructive multi-level response to the conflict. The conflict analysis overview must include knowledge of the context and actors to the conflict and their conflict issues i.e. what they have at stake, the problems, pressures, strains, fears and interests, hopes, needs and values and goals that motivate them and push them for particular kinds of behaviour. It is important to understand the relationships between parties, to check the balance of Palme Centre's own activity or contacts, to see where allies or potential allies are, to identify openings and windows of opportunity for intervention or action and of course to evaluate what has already been done.

The conflict analysis tools should be used with the aim to facilitate bringing a sustainable conflict transformation process characterised by increased trust building, deepened understanding and continuous dialog towards win-win creative problem solutions.