

POLICY ON CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

<i>Type of document:</i>	Policy
<i>Approved by:</i>	The Palme Center Board 2016-06-08
<i>Responsible for document:</i>	Secretary General
<i>Latest update:</i>	2021-06-09
<i>Latest review:</i>	2025-04-09

This policy is the basis for the Palme Center's work on the issue of conflict and conflict sensitivity. It describes how we view the issue, how we work with it and why. This policy applies to all operations, both nationally and internationally. Conflict sensitivity shall be an integrated perspective in the Palme Center's operations and systems for programming and follow-up. The implementation work is set out in, among other places, the Palme Center's operational plan and action plan for conflict sensitivity.

THE PALME CENTER'S APPROACH TO CONFLICT AND CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

Conflict arises when two or more parties consider their wills, demands, interests, values, or needs to be incompatible. Conflict may arise at a personal level, within and between groups, within and between organisations, and at international level.

Conflicts are managed, resolved, or changed in relationships. Conflict that is managed peacefully and constructively can lead to social change and transformation. A conflict that is not managed peacefully and constructively can instead grow, become destructive, hostile, and/or harmful, including for people in a vulnerable situation without direct involvement in the conflict. An example of a destructive conflict is when one or more actors resort to violence or threats of violence to achieve their goals.

The concept of conflict sensitivity in relation to development and aid implies an awareness and understanding that development efforts always affect the local context just as the context affects development efforts. The dynamics of power and conflict must be taken into account in order to prevent conflicts from getting worse in connection with the operation. These can include religious, ethnic, territorial, linguistic, and cultural divisions and loyalties that are cultivated and politicised by different groups, leaders and elites in order to achieve certain objectives and special privileges. Such structures destroy the links that bind people together, create vulnerable communities and pave the way for tension and destructive spirals of violence. The risk of negative aid effects must be made visible and carefully taken into account in the light of this. A conflict-sensitive approach can minimise any adverse effects and maximise positive effects.

THE PALME CENTER'S WORK IN A CONFLICT-RIDDEN WORLD

The Palme Center's work for progressive social change is about changing a variety of causes of social conflicts, such as power structures, oppression, poverty, inequality, marginalisation, climate and environmental degradation that degrade local habitats or the unfair distribution of natural resources. This work is founded on a rights-based approach, democratic values, solidarity, and a conviction that this work will not only lead to a strengthening of democracy and human rights, but also to peace and stability. In this process, peaceful collective actions, democratic organisation, education, and capacity building are the Palme Center's main tools for change and influence.

Although our work is intended to lead to positive results for the target groups by addressing the above-mentioned conflict factors, there is also a risk of accidentally causing damage. For example, if the work leads to strengthening negative structures, contributes to a deterioration of relations between people or to a deepening of divisions between different parts of society. Such damage, if it occurs, can also lead to an increased threat/feeling of threat to people's security, thereby causing destabilisation and further conflicts.

Working with conflict sensitivity in development efforts involves a particular focus on avoiding negative effects. For the Palme Center, it is at least as important to actively try to maximise potential positive effects.

The Palme Center's work for social change is not limited to democracy and human rights, but also involves promoting peace and human security. Thus, the Palme Center believes that these elements should be actively linked by strengthening our own and our partners' capacity to reduce sources of violence and insecurity, social tension, hatred, and extremism. Human security is about people being able to live peaceful lives, free from threats, violence, fear of violence and other causes of insecurity, for example the threat to livelihoods, health and life posed by the climate and environmental crisis.

The work on conflict sensitivity is strongly linked to the Palme Center's political priority to promote peace and dialogue and to reduce armed conflicts and social tensions. Although conflict sensitivity in development work does not necessarily mean direct work towards peace, this work nevertheless has bearing on the Palme Center's objectives of democracy, human rights, and peace. In fact, the core activities of the Palme Center – organising and enabling people to change – are about developing a viable set of institutions and rules for dealing with social conflicts without recourse to violence.

WORKING METHODS

The activities of the Palme Center shall be permeated by the thematic perspective of conflict sensitivity. More specifically, conflict-sensitivity work shall promote and, at the same time, be characterised by the following principles:

1. Inclusion, transparency, and non-discrimination. These principles ensure that positive change is achieved by engaging people beyond religious, ethnic, nationalist, sectarian or similar groupings and instead emphasising the importance of common political, idea-based, and socio-economic platforms. Our activities shall be inclusive and open to activists regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or other grounds for discrimination.

2. Non-violence. The Palme Center only applies peaceful methods and dialogue in its efforts to lift societies from poverty, oppression, inequality, negative power structures, corruption, environmental threats, violence, and insecurity. We do not recognise any other methods of conflict resolution than non-violent ones.

3. Peaceful coexistence. We promote peaceful coexistence between individuals, groups, societies, and nations by combating stereotypes, concepts of an enemy, polarisation, hatred, extremism and antagonism.

The methodological conflict sensitivity work is carried out with the objective that our operations shall be conflict sensitive, that negative impact shall be minimised, positive effects shall be maximised, and that the changes we are working for shall be more sustainable.

Integration of conflict sensitivity into operations involves strengthening awareness of our impact on local contexts in terms of actors and their interests, relations between them, social power structures and conflict dynamics. In the design, implementation and follow-up of operations, these factors must be analysed and taken into account in order to minimise negative effects and risks. Analysis, learning, and capacity building are central to the work. The Palme Center's *Conflict Lense* analysis tool is the starting point and, when relevant, other tools are also used in depth and application. One example is the *Do No Harm* approach used to identify factors that bring people together (*connectors*) and factors that drive people apart (*dividers*). The conflict sensitivity perspective shall be an integral part of the Palme Center's systems for programming and follow-up.

Conflict sensitivity interacts with other priority issues for the Palme Center, such as gender equality, the environment and climate and anti-corruption. The Palme Center shall take into account and work to make visible these central connections.

At the Palme Center's secretariat, the methodology team is responsible for integrating conflict sensitivity into operations, i.e. the implementation of strategy and policy, follow-up, and coordination in close dialogue with the parties involved.

OWNERSHIP AND FOLLOW-UP

The content of this policy is reviewed and adopted annually by the Board of the Palme Center. The Secretary General is responsible for ensuring that the policy and related documents are known and complied with in operations and that follow-up of compliance with the policy is conducted annually.