TRAINING MANUAL

Context Sensitive Research Methods

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MRLG
MEKONG REGION
LAND GOVERNANCE

covenant consult

acknowledgement

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1 Introduction

This training manual is intended to be used to provide civil society researchers with the tools to approach their research projects in difficult contexts that avoid doing harm, to both researchers and respondents.

It is intended that participants having engaged with this training will understand and be able to apply concepts of context sensitivity to their research projects in a systematic way.

It sets out a training programme that will work best – and be of most interest – if it is delivered in as participatory manner as possible, preferably in a workshop setting, with group work and consistent engagement from all participants. However, it is understood that it may need to be delivered as an on-line training – in which case it will be important to have participants who are comfortable working with each other and sharing their insights in on-line groups in order that they get the most out of the participatory approach in this training.

As with in-person participation at a workshop training, in delivering this training on-line it will be important that the trainers actively facilitate the training, ensure the consistent engagement of participants and avoid simply 'lecturing' the participants – participation is key! Where this training is delivered on-line participants should be encouraged to keep their cameras on in order to contribute as fully as possible.

For illustrative purposes only, **a sample agenda** for a context sensitive research training process is provided below. An outline for a five-day training is shown. This reflects the sections set out in this training manual. The five days should be adjusted to accommodate the time available.

SAMPLE TRAINING AGENDA

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Introductions and expectations and intentions	Re-cap of Day 1	Re-cap of Day 2	Re-cap of Day 3	Re-cap of Day 4
Key concepts of context sensitivity	Applying context analysis	Data collection	Peer learning and lesson-sharing – approaches, processes, planning, budgets, safety, other issues as requested by participants	Presentations of group work on planning and processes
Context sensitivity in research, in practice	Understanding interactions between research and context	Data and digital security	Institutionalising context sensitive research methods – *from commitment to practice in your organisation*	Peer to Peer Reflection, Learning and Exchange
Context analysis (introduction)	Expert practitioner advice	Data reliability – addressing potential bias	Group work on planning and processes for context sensitive research	Evaluation of training

2 Planning and conducting your training – key considerations ···and tips!

Training, in the context of this manual, is understood as a *process* during which participants' knowledge and experiences represent central resources, i.e. their knowledge and experience will are key to aiding a shared understanding.

Facilitators' or expert inputs fulfil only a complementary function to those of the participants. For example, to clarify conceptual questions, provide examples or introduce good practices with the objective of stimulating discussion among the training group.

This requires a specific approach and skills from facilitators that are at times more akin to the role of a moderator rather than a subject matter expert.

The *process* rather than the substance should be the facilitators concern, specifically to offer and moderate 'a safe space', in which participants are encouraged and supported to engage in joint reflection, discussion and mutual learning.

The **practical application** of instruments and concepts during the training should be a key component of the methodological approach. By practically operationalising concepts e.g during group working, role plays or simulations, the participants experience challenges and potentials in more direct manner than they could when simply listening to inputs. Please note that some inputs are often necessary though. They should be limited in time to 20min max.

Time planning of the training sessions needs to take place on a case-by-case basis, as the required amount of time depends on the group size, the existing knowledge and capacities of the participants, group dynamics and similar considerations. Adding *buffer time* when planning a training agenda, i.e. leaving a certain amount of time each day, e.g. 30 - 45min, unplanned for, as a *buffer* to use in case that certain sessions take longer than anticipated.

The **introduction** part of the training is important for making participants feel welcome and safe to engage - it sets the tone and reverberates throughout the further process. Ample time should therefore be reserved for the opening session, to allow facilitators to connect with participants, and provide the group with the opportunity to comfortably arrive in the training room and get a feeling for who else is present.

Conducting a **training pre-assessment**, i.e. speaking with or surveying participants to get a better understanding of their relevant knowledge, experiences and expectations concerning the *training content* as well as the *training process* can be a helpful tool to plan the training agenda. There is no fixed format for this; the process is rather dictated by the circumstances, e.g. availability of participants or time. If a pre-assessment is not possible, relevant experiences of participants and their expectations should be assessed (briefly) and collected during the introduction session. When reviewing participants' expectations, it is important to be transparent in how far they can be met and which ones are not or only marginally addressed during the training.

A time limited training cannot address all expectations and facilitators should be able to highlight the rationale the process is structured the way it is.

3 Key terms and Concepts

The following are broad definitions of some of the key terms and concepts relevant to context sensitive research, analysis and training.

Actor – a stakeholder or party, maybe an organisation or an individual.

Analysis – a detailed study of something complex in order to understand its key features or nature.

Buzz group – a group of three or more people in a workshop training session, used to discuss an issue or topic.

Break out group – a group of three or more people in a workshop training session, usually assigned to work together on a joint task or exercise which will be presented back to the plenary.

Context sensitivity (CS) - refers to the ability of an organisation:

- to understand the context it operates in;
- to understand the interaction between its intervention and that context;
- to act upon this understanding to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impact on the context.

Note: the word 'context' is used here to highlight that all socio-economic and political tensions, root causes and structural factors are relevant to CS because they all have the potential to become violent (see Saferworld & International Alert resource below).

Focus on the factors that are linked to disagreement in your intervention context to avoid that the analysis becomes too broad.

Data bias - refers to circumstances where the data is not representative of the phenomena (or people) the research is seeking to understand.

Intervention context – the specific site or area where your research or project will take place.

Perception – a thought, belief, insight or opinion held by someone or a group of people.

Plenary – the whole group of participants attending a meeting or training (distinct to the smaller *buzz groups*).

Reflection – serious thinking and/or careful consideration of an issue.

Structural factors – (a term from sociology) – refers to broader political, economic, social and environmental conditions and institutions that shape a context.

INTRODUCTIONS & EXPECTATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Facilitator to set out the course, its length and modules.
The facilitator will set out the pre-assessment feedback and what the course will and will not achieve.

TRAINING ROOM EXERCISE 1: CLARIFYING THE CONCEPT OF CONTEXT SENSITIVITY (CS)

Objective: Participants clarify and arrive-at a shared understanding of the concept of context sensitivity

Facilitator to provide example definitions to start this discussion.

Materials needed: Cards, markers, flipchart to write down a “*definition*" of context sensitivity.

Time required: 30 min

› Participants are invited to divide into *buzz groups* of 3-4 persons and to discuss the following questions:
  - How would you describe the concept to someone who has never heard of it before?
  - What do you consider as the main benefits of a context sensitive approach?
  - Can you provide work related examples (yours/others) where you observed behaviour that you would (now) describe as context sensitive/insensitive? What impact did this behaviour have?

› Following the discussion, participants share the key results/observations of their discussion in the plenary, facilitators synthesize discussion results, extract main points/aspects and relate it to a “definition” of context sensitivity (three points/steps introduced above).

Hints and tips:

› When debriefing group work results, allow for 3 points maximum per group, subsequent groups add new points only (this is to avoid repetition and to manage time).

› Avoid giving the impression that by presenting the “definition” of context sensitivity, participants’ points/ideas are wrong. Instead try to relate participants’ points to the “definition”. Remember that there is no right or wrong answer, just *different perspectives* and understandings. The objective of the exercise is to arrive at a shared understanding and offering a commonly used operationalisation of the concept “context sensitivity”, in which most likely the participants points are somehow reflected.

› The exercise serves also the purpose to get the group acquainted with a participatory approach where lectures are instead replaced by the discussion of questions, and expert inputs are limited in favour of providing space for participants’ own reflection, perceptions and knowledge.

4 Context Sensitivity in Practice

4.1 CONTEXT SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS - STEP 1: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT WHERE YOUR RESEARCH WILL TAKE PLACE

Understanding the profile, causes, actors, and dynamics of context in your intervention area provides you with a sound basis to plan and implement your intervention in a context sensitive manner. There is not one "right" way of doing context analysis. It depends, among other factors, on the time and resources at your disposal (resources include e.g. networks, analytical capacities, number of staff available for the analysis).

The focus of your context analysis should correspond with the level of your intervention. For example - if you are intervening on the local level you have to understand local context potentials and dynamics; if your intervention has a township or regional focus then the context analysis needs to consider township or regional issues and dynamics.

At the same time, it is important to consider how the different levels are interrelated, e.g. how national or regional dynamics and issues impact and are reflected on the community level.

Remember that no context analysis can ever be exhaustive. The goal is not academic excellence but generating an understanding that helps you sensitively navigate the context. For this, "**good enough thinking**" is sufficient, i.e. an analysis that captures the key features, themes and patterns of the context but not every detail of it!

A useful indicator that you are zooming in on the main factors is when you keep hearing the same information on the context and new information becomes sparser.

Contexts are often volatile and bound to change, it is of utmost importance that you **continuously monitor dynamics**.

How such a monitoring process is best set up in the context of your organization or project is best defined during the analysis process to decide what aspects to monitor, to establish related roles and responsibilities within your team and allocate the necessary resources.

As resource allocation is also determined by the budget proposed to the respective donor, it is most likely necessary to develop a basic idea for a context monitoring system *prior* to engaging in context analysis when developing the proposal to the donor agency.

4.2 PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Some **good practices** to consider when conducting context analysis include:

- The analysis identifies key driving factors and key actors.[1]
- The analysis is updated and tested regularly/periodically.
- The scope of the analysis is appropriate (not too broad or narrow); and mitigates bias towards your/an organization's expertise or general assumptions.
- The analysis process is inclusive and includes the different perspectives of men, women, a cross section of social groups (ethnic, religious….) within the context.

2. Some **suggested guiding questions** for context analysis *(please amend as you see fit!)*:

Profile

- What is the geographic area relevant to your organization's work?
- What is the political, economic, and socio-cultural context?
- What open/latent issues between parties exist in the project region? What forms of disagreement can be identified? Are there non-violent disagreements with the potential to erupt?
- How are access to and control over land and natural resources related to the context?

Actors

- Who are the key actors affecting the context dynamics (positively/negatively)?
- What are their main interests, goals, positions, capacities, and relationships?
- Who is affected by any disagreements and how?

1 Key driving factors are elements/dynamics without which the conflict would not exist or would be significantly different. Key actors are people or groups that can significantly influence the conflict dynamics.

Causes

› What are the (structural, proximate) causes?
› What factors contribute to peace?

Dynamics

› What are current trends? How may the possibly develop in the future?
› How would you know whether key issues got better/worse; if the dynamics deescalate/escalate?

3. Some **tools for structuring information** obtained by answering the above (and other) questions[2]:

The complexities of contexts and the amount of information that you obtain by asking the above questions can become quickly overwhelming. Analysis tools can be helpful in this regard. They can be used to assess different characteristics of a context in a structured way, to visualize important aspects of a context and to organize information.

2 As indicated, the examples below are based on *Fisher et al (2000)* (see the "useful resources" section) and cited from https://gsdrc.org/topic-guides/conflict-analysis/core-elements/

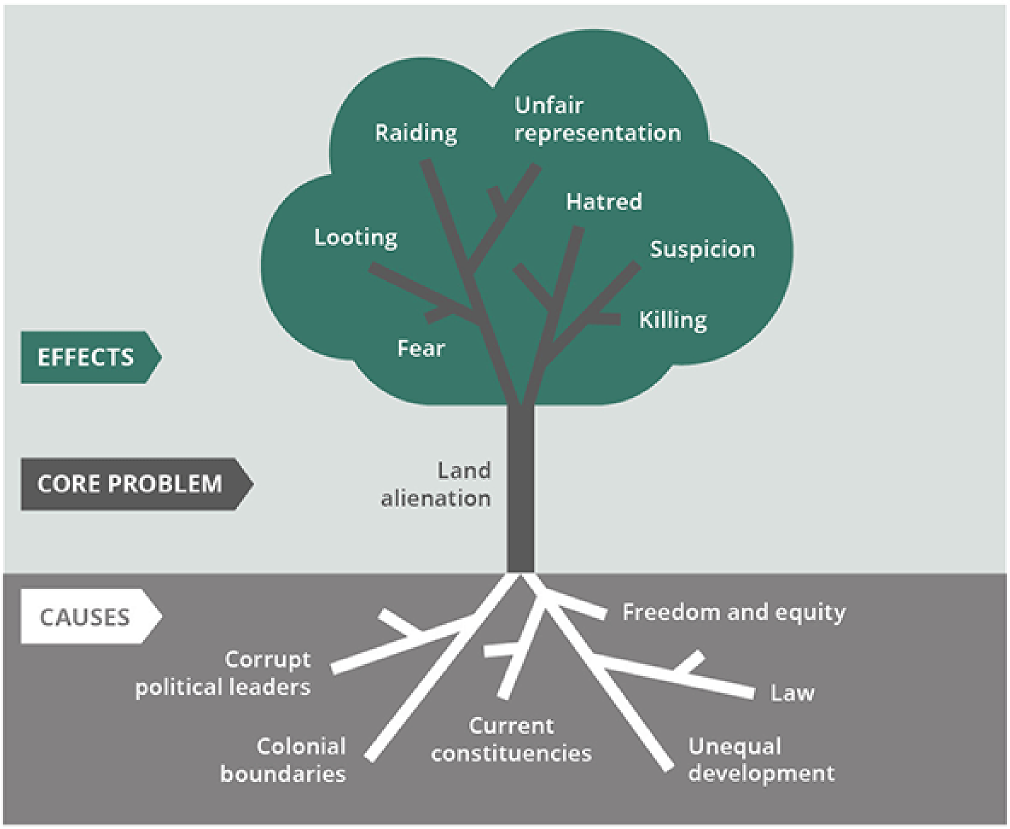
THE PROBLEM TREE

The problem tree is a tool to visualize and structure information concerning the causes of an issue (or a core problem) and its consequences/effects.

Root causes are the factors that give rise to a given context – the factors the context is *rooted* in. The trunk of the tree represents the main issue, i.e. what the problem is about. Finally, the branches symbolize the effects of the problem, i.e. what happens as a result of (destructive) problems.

Note that these effects can in turn become causes for new or further problems themselves, e.g. when displacement leads to tensions between IDPs and host communities over scarce local resources such as land, water, or livelihood opportunities.

The tree helps to get an easy-to-digest, visual summary of the causes, themes and consequences of a problem. This may facilitate later reflections on how your intervention may possibly reinforce grievances concerning the root causes of a problem or aggravate its effects, and support you in adjusting your activities so that they avoid doing harm and even mitigate adverse consequences.

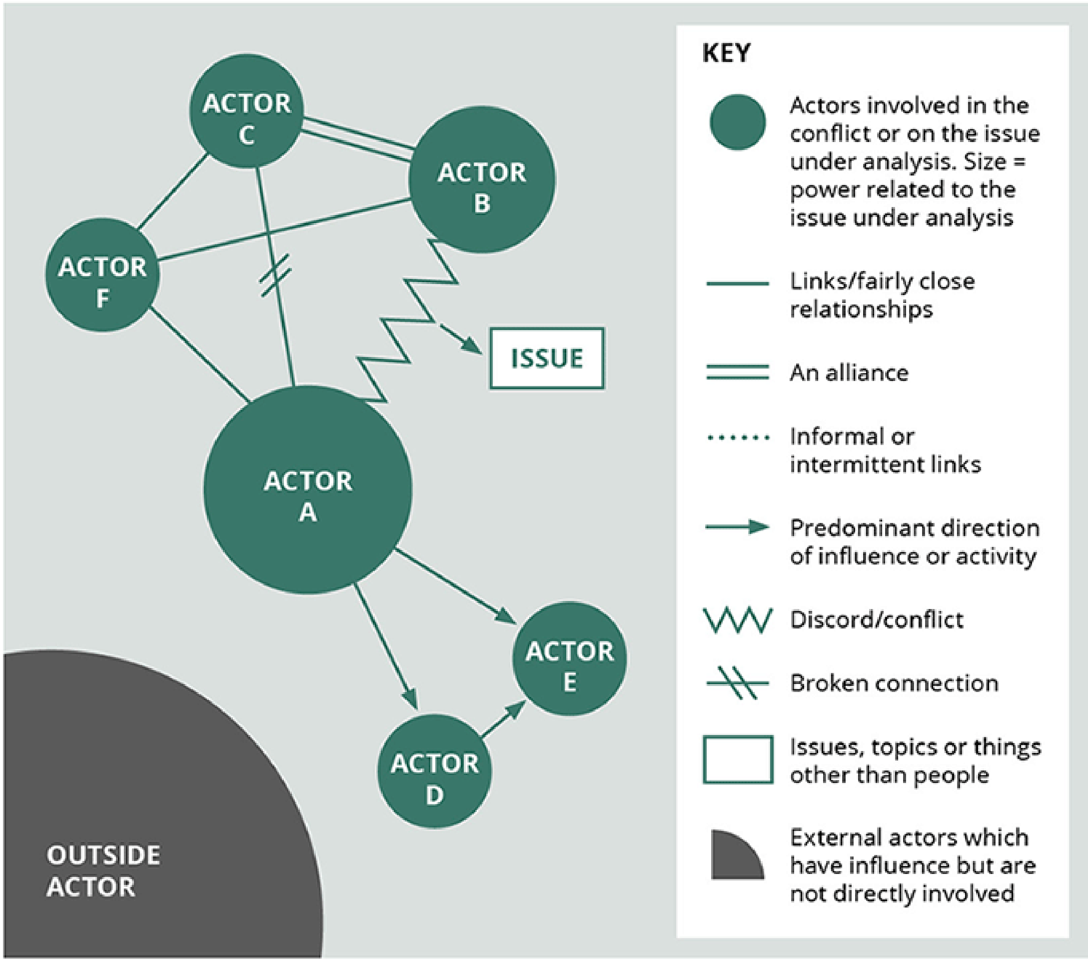


Source: Fisher, et al. (2000: 29) // taken from https://gsdrc.org/topic-guides/conflict-analysis/core-elements/

ACTOR MAPPING

Actor mapping is a tool to depict the parties and stakeholders in a given context, their relative power, and their relationships. In a context map, actors in any system are represented by circles. Their relative "power" or "resources" (both material and non-material), i.e their ability to influence the context or situation, can be represented by the size of their respective circles – a larger circle for more powerful actors, a smaller circle for less powerful actors. The map can be used to visualize your perception of the power distribution between the different actors. The relationship between the different actors (friction, animosity, friendship, alliance) is depicted with different forms of lines. Key issues between actors can also be highlighted, e.g. in the form of a rectangle/text box as illustrated in the example below.

Conducting an actor map is a useful tool if you want to get an overview of the actor landscape in a given context setting and get a first idea of how your intervention may possibly impact the relationships of different parties.



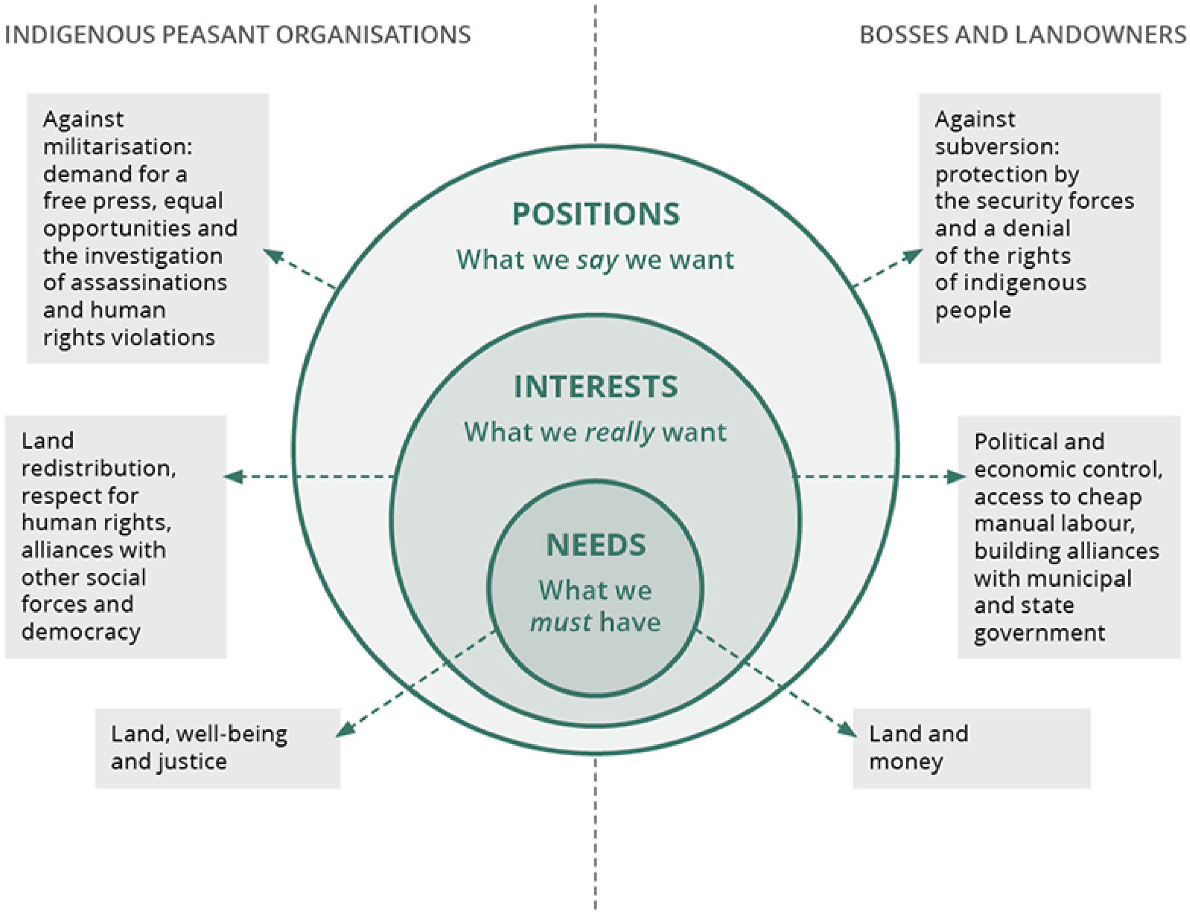
Source: Adapted from Fisher, et al. (2000: 23) // taken from https://gsdrc.org/topic-guides/conflict-analysis/core-elements/

THE ONION

Understanding the motivations behind stakeholders' actions and statements helps you to better navigate the actor landscape and, for instance, avoid being seen as undermining or advancing a stakeholders' interests or agenda at the expense of those of others.

The onion is a tool to structure your understanding of what lies behind an actor's statements and demands in a specific context.

In peeling away the different layers of an onion, the analytical focus reveals the interests and needs behind a position that an actor publicly takes.



Source: Adapted from Fisher, et al. (2000: 27) // taken from https://gsdrc.org/topic-guides/conflict-analysis/core-elements/

APPLYING CONTEXT ANALYSIS

TRAINING ROOM EXERCISE 2: APPLYING CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Objective: Participants are able to systematically analyse a situation in their work context.

Material needed: flipcharts, moderation cards, markers. Optional: handouts on analysis tools

Time required: depending on group size, at least 90 min when working with 3 break-out groups and excluding the time of facilitators introducing analysis tools (30 min including Question & Answer sessions).

The outline below describes a process for analyzing cases that are provided by participants themselves.
This makes the work in the training room more concrete and easier to relate to for participants. However, this approach is dependent on the willingness of participants to share examples and their ability (or the ability of other participants) to provide contextual information on the examples that can be structured and analyzed.

If participants are reluctant to share or it is deemed – for whatever reason - too sensitive to work on participants' cases, then facilitators can provide a fictional case study example from another context (possibly anonymized by replacing names of institutions or actors with fictional ones). This provides facilitators with more control over the process and ensures that an adequate case is available for the exercise. However, it also adds to the workload in the preparation of the training.

› The facilitators explain that they would like to base the context analysis exercise on examples that are relevant to participants' work. For this, they ask whether some of the participants are able and willing to share examples of geographic areas where they or their organisations have recently conducted, are presently conducting, or are planning to conduct research soon. Participants who are willing to share, briefly present their cases in the plenary while facilitators extract the main information with questions. This should take no more than 2-5min.

› Training participants are divided into break out groups according to interest. Case providers need to have sufficient contextual insight to brief their group about the context dynamics and issues within the context where their research project takes place. Other group members extract the relevant information by interviewing the case provider. The information is structured according to the analysis categories introduced above. If participant opt to do so, they use the analysis tools for structuring context related information introduced above.

› In case of missing, contradicting information, uncertainties, open questions – participants outline how to go about collecting missing information, who to talk to, etc. In case participants in sub-groups disagree or there are different perspectives concerning certain aspects of the analysis, they will be highlighted for further investigation. Differing perspectives may be reflective of divergent perspectives on issues in the intervention context.

› When debriefing the group works, facilitators review with participants:
- Is the scope of the analysis appropriate (What is the exact context we are looking at)?
- Does the analysis identify key drivers and key actors?
- Does the analysis also consider less visible forms, such as exclusion from access to services, decision making process…?
- Does the analysis consider how men and women are affected differently?
- Is the analysis biased towards the organization's expertise/interest (e.g. related to land)?

Tips:

› When participants present their cases, take care not to get lost in detail!

› What should become clear is whether the research either was, is or will be conducted; where it is conducted, what's the interest/purpose of the research, who is involved (if not too sensitive, possibly anonymized), and whether the case giver knows enough about the context to provide her/his subgroup with sufficient information on dynamics in the context. The purpose is for the other participants to get some basic information to decide whether a given case study is of interest to them, and for facilitators to decide whether the presented case is suitable for the exercise, primarily whether enough context related information are available.

› The method for the debrief is for the facilitators to decide. If a presentation by subgroups in the plenary is foreseen, *at least* 15min presentation time per group need to be calculated (including Q&A).

PRACTICAL APPLICATION - ON-GOING CONTEXT ANALYSIS - A QUICK CHECKLIST

- Roles – who is involved and how?
- Stakeholder mapping/analysis
- Specifying *good* information sources (analogue and online)
- Monitoring schedule/intervals for consultations, interviews, focus group discussions
- Data analysis and security
- In-depth analysis
- Sharing the analysis – with whom and how?

4.3 CONTEXT SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS - STEP 2: UNDERSTANDING THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE INTERVENTION AND CONTEXT

The interaction between an intervention – in this case a research project/process – needs to be understood in two ways: the impact of the context on the project as well as the impact that the project may have on the context.

The first aspect is generally referred to in terms of risk management. The second one looks at possible unintended negative impacts the project may have on the context (creating new or reinforcing existing tensions) as well as the positive impact the project may have (mitigating tensions or strengthening factors that contribute to peace, social cohesion, etc).

The exact nature of interactions will be context specific and must be assessed on a case-by-case basis!

Some examples for **how context may affect research**:
- Limited access to certain areas of interest;
- Researchers cannot stay for extended periods of time in communities for observation purposes;
- Researchers cannot meet people due to security considerations;

Some examples for **how research may negatively affect the context**/do harm:
- Putting research participants in danger, e.g. when armed / powerful actors access sensitive data collected by researchers or by quoting and identifying respondents;
- Raising awareness for issues/problems implicitly raises expectations of tangible change as a result of the research process;
- Risks of re-traumatizing;
- Research may take time from livelihoods; may affect capacities for peace or could exacerbates existing patterns of exclusion.

Some examples for **how research may positively affect the context**:
- Generate research results that help to address drivers of disagreement and tension;
- Give a voice to victims and highlight different narratives;
- Strengthen spaces for dialogue across actors and lines;

4.4 CONTEXT SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS - STEP 3: ACT UPON THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND CONTEXT TO AVOID NEGATIVE IMPACTS AND MAXIMIZE POSITIVE IMPACTS

The understanding of the potential interaction between project and context needs to be followed by adjusting the research process so that it is context sensitive.

At the very least, this means mitigating the unintended negative impacts the project may have. Adhering to the principle of "*Do no Harm*" represents the minimum standard.

Ideally, considerations go beyond that minimum standard and also include proactively looking for opportunities to maximize the positive impact a research project may have on context dynamics and issues - *even though that is not its primary objective.*

Integrating a context sensitive lens into research activities;

THE THREE MAIN PARTS

- Planning
- Implementation (including interviews, analysis and presentation of research results)
- Evaluation and learning

TRAINING ROOM EXERCISE 3: INTEGRATING A CONTEXT SENSITIVITY LENS INTO RESEARCH PROJECTS

Objective: The participants can operationalize the concept of context sensitivity in the context of their research projects.

Material needed: Markers, cards, flipcharts. Handout guiding questions.

Time required: Dependent on group size, at least 120min when working with three breakout groups.

› Training participants are divided into break out groups. Each group works with a case study, i.e. a research project that either has happened, is happening, or will happen in the near future. The case studies are provided by participants who are:
- Willing to share it and use it as an example for the group to work on;
- Know well enough about the research project to act as a resource person and information provider to the group.

› In break out groups, the participants "unpack" their research project case studies by reviewing central aspects of the research design and the research process. By reflecting on questions related to **where** the research is conducted (and where not), **what** is researched, **when** research activities are conducted, **with whom** (and for whom) research is conducted (and with whom not), **why** research is conducted / with what objective, and **how** data collection, analysis and communication of research results are going to take place, participants identify:
- possible unintended negative impacts their research project may have and the risks it may face (context sensitivity *concerns*),
- the positive impacts their research projects may have (context sensitivity *opportunities*),
- as well as possible risks for the research project emanating from the context.

› It is important that this reflection includes the research organizations' own positioning in the context!

Below is a list of **guiding questions that can be discussed when reflecting on the context sensitivity of research projects**. The list is not meant to be exhaustive and further questions may be relevant for a given research project.[3]

Context sensitivity considerations for research projects

› *Research design*:
- Research topic: for whom is this relevant? Who benefits?
- Context in which research is conducted: implications for access, security and data quality?
- What measures can you take to ensure flexibility to adapt to a volatile context?
- In which language does the research take place? What terminology and what discourses are used (who is familiar with them, what assumptions do they convey)?
- What are the main risks that are identifiable? How do you assess these – are they high, medium or low risks?

› *Positioning within the context*
- How are you perceived within the context? With whom do you collaborate and how are these partners perceived within the context?
- How is the donor's agenda and the donor itself perceived in the context?
- How is the research topic perceived? Is it politically or socially sensitive?
- Is research itself positively or negatively connoted? How will those involved in research be perceived after the research has ended – will they be in danger?
- What are assumptions, values and beliefs that are communicated through the research?
- How is the behaviour of the research team perceived, e.g. where they stay, how they travel, interact with local communities…?

3 The examples are based on Bentele 2020.

- *Research methodology*
  - In what context and with whom can you speak about sensitive issues? How might this fuel tension or revive trauma? Can you create safe spaces?
  - What aspects of your research could you adapt without jeopardizing it? Where is the difference between adaptations and (self-)censorship and how do you communicate it?
  - What are the expectations of those participating in the research/the communities you work with concerning your research?
  - What are adequate personal safety and data security measures (for researchers and participants/local communities)?
  - As an organization, which security protocols do you have in place?
  - How could research participants potentially be harmed if the data collected ends up in the wrong hands?
  - What does this mean for presenting/communicating your research results?

- Following reflecting on and discussing these questions, the participants list:
  - The main risks for the respective research project emanating from the context;
  - The main context sensitivity *concerns* associated with the research project (risks of doing harm);
  - The main context sensitivity *opportunities* (opportunities to mitigate disagreement and/or to strengthen peace/social cohesion) the research project may offer.

- The participants review their lists and discuss possible adjustments that need to be made to the research design and process to successfully:
  - Manage the context specific risks for the research project;
  - Mitigate risks of doing harm;
  - Capitalize on opportunities to positively impact the context through the research project.

Tips:

- This can be a follow-on exercise to the above context analysis group work. If so, the break out groups can continue working on the cases identified during the context analysis exercise. If not, and this is a sperate exercise, some sort of understanding of the main context factors and actors needs to be established. In this case, it is again important that each break out group includes resource persons for the respective contexts, i.e. persons who can act as information providers on context dynamics and issues in the context the research project is located in. More time also needs to be allocated to allow for context analysis before the groups proceed to look at the interaction between context and their research projects.

- If debriefing of group work results is done by having groups subsequently present in the plenary, presentations should be limited to 20min per group (including Q&A). If possible, organize presentations so that a tea break is had after max. 2 presentations to avoid exposing participants to too much consecutive input. Alternatives like a “marketplace” provide for more interactive debriefing when dealing with a large group or lots of break out groups.

- The exercise can also be broken down in smaller pieces to make it more digestible, for example, focusing in separate steps on research design, methodology, positioning in context. This would depend, among others, on the time available, training groups size, knowledge and capacities of the group.

4.5 PRACTICAL APPLICATION: CHECKLIST FOR CONTEXT SENSITIVE RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

Interview preparation[4]:

Understanding context:

- Are they key drivers that determine the context and the associated key actors and their interests understood?
- Is the research team, including concerned partners, involved in the context analysis?
- Are mechanisms in place to monitor the context prior, during, and after the research activities?
- Are the implications for research activities understood and are context sensitivity concerns (risks of doing harm) and context sensitivity opportunities (possibilities to have a positive impact on context) identified?
- Has this understanding informed the context sensitive planning of interviews, including:
  - The setting and timing of the interviews?
  - The selection (process) of interview participants?
  - How the research is introduced to interviewees in clear and simple terms, including: what's the interest of the research; how the information provided in the interview is used; how confidentiality is ensured and how other anticipated safety and security concerns of interviewees are addressed; highlighting that participation in the interview is voluntary; how the research results will be communicated back to participants once complete; managing the expectations of participants?
  - Has it been decided on the best way to frame the interview questions and the language in which interviews will be conducted?

During the interviews:

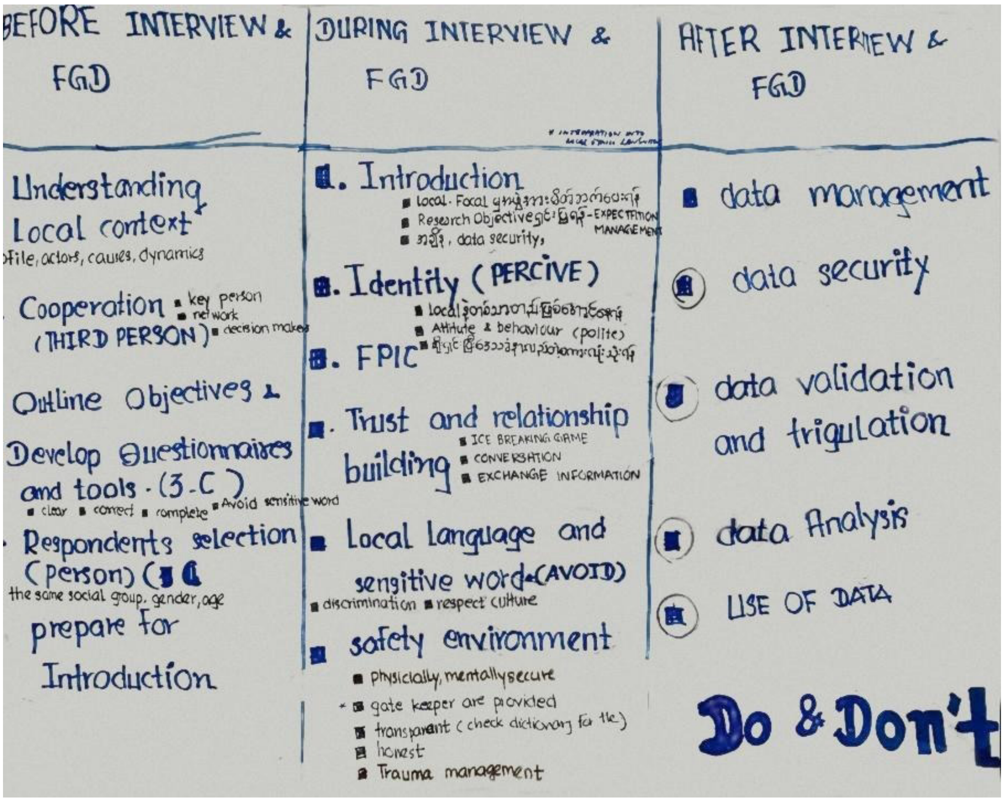
- Is the timing, the location and the atmosphere right to make interviewees feel safe and comfortable?
- Is the research team, the research process and purpose introduced in a way that it is understood by the participants? Have they been asked and confirmed that they understood?
- Have participants had the opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns concerning the interview process including how the information they provide is used? Has the research team satisfactorily responded to those questions and concerns?
- Do participants understand that they are free to participate in the interview and not to answer questions or to end the interview at any time if they wish to do so?
- Are the interviewers focusing on easing participants into the interview process by asking non-controversial or neutral questions in the beginning?
- Is the body language and behaviour of the participants indicating that they feel comfortable? Are they answering/discussing freely even in response to sensitive questions and issues?
- Are the interviewees providing any indications of social desirability bias (see below, point 5.2.)? If yes, are interviewers responding with mitigating measures (see below, point 5.3.)
- When ending the interviews, are interviewers providing participants to ask any questions? Are interviewers explain (again) next steps and how the information will be used in the research project?

After the interviews:

- Is the data recorded in a way that protects participants privacy, and mitigates the risks of repercussion even if the data were to be accessed by context actors?
- Is the data stored in a way that is safe and secure? Are measures in place to validate the collected data? Are research participants involved in validating research findings?
- Are mechanisms in place to inform research participants about the outcome and/or the use of the research findings at least in terms of process, i.e. what has happened following the interviews and/or the communication of research findings?

4 If not indicated otherwise the same processes apply to FGDs.

PICTURE 1: WORKSHOPPING APPROACHES TO INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS



5 Reliability of data

5.1 HOW RELIABLE IS YOUR DATA AND HOW ARE RESEARCHERS PERCEIVED BY DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS?

It is important that the data you collect is reliable. Any research findings are only as strong as the data on which they are based and researchers need to be aware where they might be faced with unreliable data.

Data bias refers to circumstances where the data is not representative of the phenomena (or people) the research is seeking to understand. This can come about as the content of (some) of the source data captured maybe 'skewed' providing unrepresentative results. This bias maybe intentional or unintentional. It is something to be aware of in conducting your research. From a context-sensitivity perspective failure to spot data bias could result in discriminatory findings.

In spotting potential bias in interview or focus group discussion responses, it is important to understand how you are perceived as a researcher. Ask simply, how are researchers working in areas with differences and problems perceived by different parties and stakeholders? What does this perception mean for the assumptions and potential bias that might be presented in the data?

5.2 SOCIAL DESIRABILITY BIAS

Social desirability bias, which is a special kind of *response* bias, can seriously affect the validity and accuracy of the information obtained during the research process.

Social desirability bias refers to people giving answers in line with what *they believe* to be socially acceptable rather than revealing their true feelings, e.g. because they deem the matter too sensitive.

Possible hints of social desirability bias in the context of interviews or Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) may be:

- Denial of problems or challenges
- Excessive praise on an issue, topic, organization
- Partial or vague answers
- Body language

5.3 MITIGATING SOCIAL DESIRABILITY BIAS

- Present information in a judgement free manner (introduction of the study, the formulation of the questions…);
- Indirect questioning – "how has xyz dealt with it, behaved, acted (in the past…)?";
- Providing assurances – confidentiality and anonymity protocols; provide assurance that opinions are not wrong;
- Probing for more information – ask follow up questions;
- Request participants for stories or examples to illustrate statements;
- Acknowledge everyone/all communities have challenges, people have diverse experiences.

5.4 MEASURES TO MITIGATE BIAS IN THE ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

- Use multiple people to code the data.
- Have participants review your results.
- Verify with more data sources /Triangulation.
- Check for alternative explanations.
- Review findings with peers.

6 Organizational structures: from commitment to practice

Often work pressures and deadlines mean that there are incentives to just move ahead on work, including research in sensitive areas on sensitive topics which should be approached more slowly and cautiously, in order that the points above are under-taken in a systematic way. These incentives need to be resisted. Key to this is working out how, in your organisation, the commitment to context sensitive research is put into practice; how do we ensure it is done *properly*?

TRAINING ROOM EXERCISE 4: INSTITUTIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT

Objective: Participants review their own organisational structures processes from a context sensitivity perspective.

Material needed: None. Optional: writing materials (notebooks, pens, cards, markers).

Time required: 45 – 60 min.

› Participants reflect on how to sustainably integrate context sensitivity thinking and approaches in their respective organizations. To do so, facilitators divide participants into sub-groups and ask them to reflect on and discuss the following questions:
- How are organizational structures and processes promoting or challenging the integration of a context sensitivity lens into your (research) work?
- Which organizational changes, if any, are necessary to operate in a context sensitive manner?

› Participants are asked to think of, for example:
- Organizational structure, including leadership and decision making
- Funding streams and management of donors/funders
- Capacities and resources, including partner system

› Participants peer coach each other in the reflection process and in the identification of possible changes to enhance the context sensitivity in their organizational set up.

› Participants present the main insights and observations from the group work in the plenary. The debrief should include how observations can be sensitively reported back to their respective organizational leadership. Any critical points should be framed in a constructive manner, i.e. include suggestions on how the identified challenges can be realistically addressed.

Tips:

› The group work and framing of questions can happen in any manner deemed suitable by the facilitators. The main point here is that it is not enough to just design a research process in a context sensitive manner. There are institutional aspects that, if unaddressed, may make it difficult to implement the project sensitively, for example.; lacking personnel to monitor context and possible unintended impacts, insufficient information sharing within the organization that would enable the project to respond to contextual changes, lacking security protocols or technical capacities.

› As it may be frustrating for participants to identify institutional challenges that cannot be influenced by them under present circumstances, facilitators can moderate a discussion and per coaching process among participants what options for context sensitive operations and adjustments exist within the given institutional framework.

7 Digital Security

7.1 MAIN POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

Taking steps to ensure digital (data) security is critically important, for both researchers working on areas affected by difference and problems and, of course, to ensure the safety of any respondents.

Main points include…

1. Understanding the difference between "Privacy" and "Anonymity."
   - Privacy: Nobody is seeing what you do but potentially knowing who you are.
   - Anonymity: Nobody is knowing who you are but potentially seeing what you do.

2. Selecting the appropriate platforms and method of Data Storage based on the Data Security Risk and Online availability.
   - Cloud or Local Storage
   - Data Encryption
   - Data Hiding

3. Selecting the appropriate methods of Communication Platform based on the Data Security Risk.
   - Is it End to End encryption?
   - Does it have Self-destruction feature?
   - Phone number hiding features?

4. Cryptography & Steganography
   - Cryptography - technique of securing information and communications through use of codes. For example, VeraCrypt
   - Steganography - the practice of concealing a message within another message or a physical object.

5. Being aware of social engineering attack or Human hacking and Prevention
   - HTTP vs HTTPS
   - The success of Phishing Attack with less advanced technical skill.
   - Two-factor authentication: SMS, google authenticator

6. Make use of File Shredder software to make the deleted files harder to be recovered

7.2 KEY DIGITAL SECURITY RESOURCES

Password Good habits
- Practice Good Password Habits at https://security.type.hk/en/%F0%9F%94%92-practice-good-password-habits/

Safe Browsing
- HTTPs Everywhere at https://www.eff.org/https-everywhere
- Disconnect me at https://disconnect.me
- Secure Browser at https://security.type.hk/en/ -setup-a-secure-browser/
- Destroy Google Activity Data and Disable Tracking at https://security.type.hk/en/ -destroy-google-activity-history/

Hide files/app on Android and IOS
- Hide your document and photos at https://security.type.hk/en/ -hide-your-documents-and-photos/
- Hide your apps at https://security.type.hk/en/ -decide-how-to-hide-your-apps/

Removing Data
- File Shredding at https://www.fileshredder.org

2FA guide
- Multi Factor Authentification at https://security.type.hk/en/%F0%9F%94%92-use-multi-factor-authentication/

Data Encryption and Steganography tools
- Data Encryption

Source 1 at https://security.type.hk/en/ - %EF%B8%8F-setup-an-encrypted-vault/

Source 2 at https://www.veracrypt.fr/code/VeraCrypt/
- Steganography at https://www.openstego.com/index.html

8 Peer-to-Peer learning

It is important to factor-in time in the training agenda for participants to learn from each others' experience – *if the participants want to*.

This is best done towards the end of the training period – when participants have had an opportunity to get to know each other better (at least in respect of their thoughts and views on context sensitive research) and can reflect on points made and issues raised in the course of the training. In the sample agenda (above) this session has been placed on the last day but those facilitating the training will be best placed to judge when it should take place.

For example, trainers might should simply ask participants if they want to take the opportunity in the course of the training to have some dedicated time set aside for peer-to-peer learning, noting that the different experiences in planning and conducting research of the participants is valuable and where participants are comfortable, there would be significant value in sharing these.

The trainers should only facilitate this session, setting-out that it is dedicated time for participants to share their views and experiences and offer advice, *not* to seek to direct or shape the participants' discussion.

The exact content of peer-to-peer discussion and learning should be determined by the participants themselves – *what do they believe it would be most useful to discuss; what do they wish to learn from their training participant peers?* Participants might want to discuss risks and steps taken for staff safety and security, or other, issues, like organising researchers, interviews and focus groups.

If there are demands from participants to learn of each others' particular experiences in say managing travel or risks or organising field work – then it might be useful to have separate break out groups to allow for peer-to-peer learning and exchanges on these particular topics.

The timing of this session can vary but to be useful to participants it is likely to require at least 1 hour.

9 Workshop Feedback

It is important to solicit feedback on any training you give, in order to try to improve the next training you provide. Training facilitators can decide what questions they would like to receive feedback on, but example questions would include…

POTENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR FEEDBACK:

- Did the workshop meet your expectations?
- Was it the right length of time?
- How satisfied were you with the trainers/facilitators?
- Was the workshop content relevant?
- Were the expert inputs useful [*where they took place]?
- Please note any suggestions, comments or recommendations.

Useful Resources

Bentele Ursina (2020): Guidelines to Conflict Sensitive Research. Swiss Academies Communications 15 (5), available at:https://scnat.ch/en/uuid/i/aba6e298-4e7a-5c89-a2f2-46cd04264ff1-Guidelines_to_Conflict_Sensitive_Research

Saferworld: Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding, available at:https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/148-conflict-

Annex

PRE-TRAINING – ASSESSING THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF PARTICIPANTS

In order to ensure the training is meeting the specific context sensitivity training of participants it would be useful to have participants answer a number of brief questions.

1. Does your organisation have guidance for how to under-take research? (Y/N) Does this include guidance or a statement or standard operating procedures for under-taking research? (Y/N) *If yes, please provide a copy of the relevant document.*

2. Does your organisation have an express policy statement or commitment to working in a way that is context-sensitive and with a commitment to the principle of 'Do No Harm' and mitigating risks? *If yes, please provide a copy of the relevant document.*

3. Have staff in your organisation received training on context-sensitive approaches or on the ethics and principles of conducting research ? *If yes, please briefly describe or provide any documents on the content of that training.*

4. What do you think are 1) your own and 2) your organisation's main needs in respect of context sensitive research approaches? *For example in having a commitment across the organisation to context-sensitivity, or in having a better understanding across all staff of the principles of context sensitivity or, in its practical application?*

5. Are there specific topics or issues you think the context sensitive research training should focus on? *For example, on ethics and principles, conducting interviews or analysis of data or other topics?*

6. Please note any other relevant points you would like to keep in mind for the training.

This training manual is intended to be used to provide civil society researchers with the tools to approach their research projects in difficult contexts that avoid doing harm, to both researchers and respondents. This Training Manual has been elaborated in collaboration with the members of the Alliance for the Recognition of Customary Tenure in Myanmar. It is the result of a training workshop for the same partners facilitated by Covenant Consult and supported by MRLG in July 2022.

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