



Regional Learning & Advocacy Programme for Vulnerable Dryland Communities

TECHNICAL BRIEF: Planning in conflict - Experiences with the ‘Do No Harm’ conflict-sensitive programming approach in pastoralist settings

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Summary

The Improved Community Response to Drought (ICRD) project is a cross-border drought preparedness project funded under ECHO’s Regional Drought Decision. It is being implemented by Vétérinaires sans Frontières (VSF) Belgium, Switzerland and Germany with the overall objective of improving the livelihood security of pastoralists in the Karamoja, Oromiya and Somali ecosystems of Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia. Rather than providing significant levels of external support, the project enables pastoralists to build on their own knowledge and utilise their existing assets (both social and capital) more effectively. Project planners, well aware of the conflict environment in all three areas of the ICRD project, made the assumption that having conflict management as part of the interventions—particularly through conflict-sensitive community planning - would result in increased access to dry season grazing and water, and thereby increase livelihood security.

VSF-Germany is responsible for the ICRD activities on the Kenyan-Ethiopian border, where the particular dynamics of the situation means conflict was a major main problem that the project would need to address appropriately. VSF Germany decided to use the ‘Do No Harm’ approach to ensure that the project was conflict sensitive. Introducing this approach has had a surprising effect on the attitudes within the communities to promote peace building, and has resulted in a number of successful community led initiatives. This technical brief documents the process undertaken and recommends how it could be strengthened amongst other agencies working in conflict prone environments in the future. The ‘Do No Harm’ approach does not encourage aid agencies to change their mandates and become peace agencies, but rather supports them to undertake relief and development at the same time as ensuring that their interventions do not worsen existing conflicts.

The strategy behind the ‘Do No Harm Approach’

Whilst everyone expects to find divisions and tensions in conflict settings, most people overlook a situation’s capacity for peace. In a conflict context it is possible to identify both ‘dividers’ and ‘connectors’, i.e. the people, structures and systems that either divide or connect society, and therefore either perpetuate the conflict or mitigate it. Within every society there are individuals and systems to whom the roles of conflict prevention and mediation are

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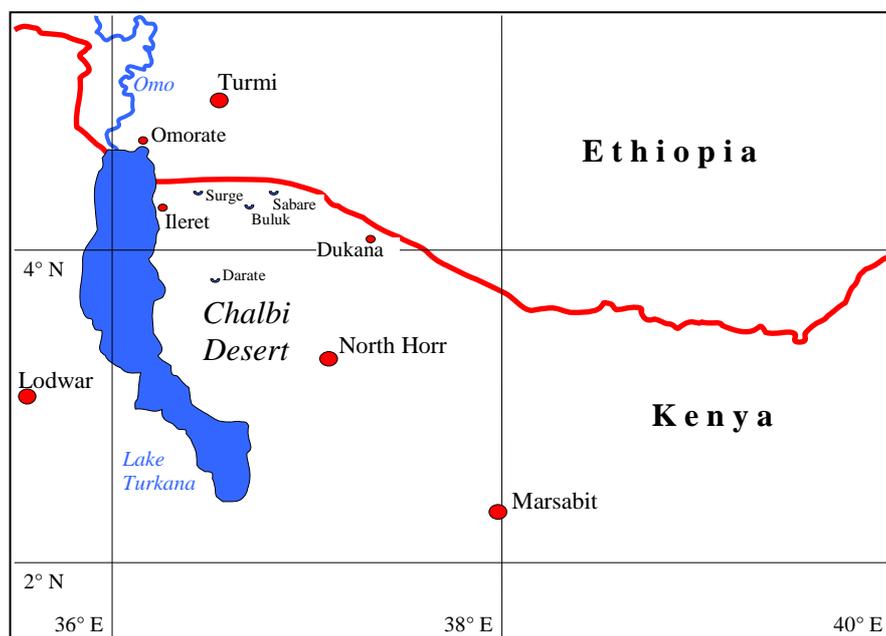
assigned. These include justice and legal systems, police forces, implicit codes of conduct, elders groups, church or civic leaders, etc. In the 'Do No Harm' approach these are called the 'capacities for peace.'

All aid programmes involve the transfer of resources—cash, food, health care, training, capacity building, etc. When aid or development is provided in situations of conflict it will always interact with the conflict, either through the resource transfers or implicit ethical messages. Many people in conflict areas will attempt to control and use the resources provided to support their side of the conflict. The 'Do No Harm' approach seeks to avoid this scenario by specifically strengthening the 'connectors', or at least by not undermining them—rather than the 'dividers'.

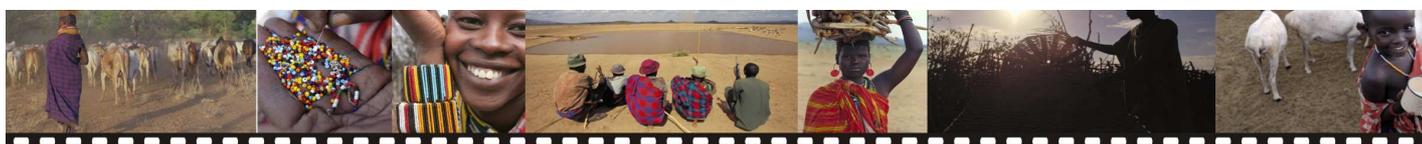
The approach encourages aid and development to be provided within conflict settings in ways that, rather than exacerbating conflict, help local people to disengage from the violence that surrounds them, so that they can begin to develop alternative systems for addressing the problems that underlie the conflict.

Context – the communities in conflict

The border between Kenya and Ethiopia is inhabited by pastoral communities who are largely cut off from the development activities of their respective countries—not helped by the fact that it takes two days from the border to reach either capital by road. Health and education services are poor or non-existent. The main ethnic groups on the Kenyan side are the Gabbra and the Dasanach. Both live in Marsabit North District, to the east of Lake Turkana, in a harsh environment where transhumant livestock keeping is the only feasible land-use. The few other economic activities that are possible, such as meat production/processing or fishing in Lake Turkana, are seriously impeded by the area's inaccessibility. The traditional lands of the Dasanach are to the east of the lake on both sides of the Kenyan-Ethiopian border, with the small town of Ileret as their centre. The area of the Gabbra is further to the east and to the south, covering the fringes of the Chalbi desert with the town of North Horr as the economic capital of the district.



Although both the Gabbra and the Dasanach share pastoralist livelihoods, they are clearly distinguishable in their language, clothing and culture. The Gabbra are much better integrated into the Kenyan state and have always



benefited from education—through the Catholic mission in North Horr—as well as from local NGOs lobbying for their particular community. Feeling marginalized by the national government, a local government dominated by the Gabbra, and local NGOs, some members of the Dasanach community have resorted to force in order to overcome perceived injustices. Attacks and counter-attacks, raids on each others' livestock, allegations about the stealing of animals and demands for their return, as well as questions of 'pride' and 'honour', have kept tensions high between the two communities for a long time.

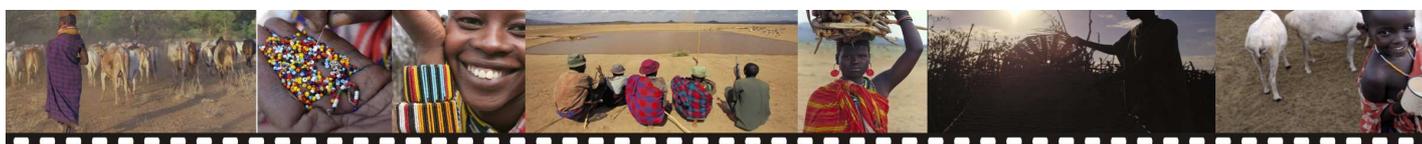
Across the border in Ethiopia, the Gabbra are linked by kinship and common language to the Borana. But serious conflict in 2005 has created a deep-rooted mistrust—dividing the two groups, causing banditry and displacement of communities, and the effective closure of many grazing areas due to insecurity. Cross-border conflicts between the Dasanach and Hamar in Ethiopia are also commonplace, made possible by the widespread availability of small arms and limited police interference.

For VSF-Germany to begin implementation of project activities in these volatile areas a cessation of hostilities and some sort of peace agreement would clearly be necessary. Developing community-based coping mechanisms against droughts would not be possible unless the communities had free access to essential water resources and grazing areas. And only with reciprocal grazing agreements in place would VSF be in a position to promote the improvement of feeding mechanisms for animals and invest in the rehabilitation of wells. Even the provision of veterinary services is impacted by security, with diseases being spread much quicker when animals are kept in confined areas.

Conflict sensitive programming

Following the ICRD programme's initial intervention plan, the VSF project on the Kenyan-Ethiopian border started with participatory resource mapping—identifying the existing pasture areas, settlements, wells, markets and administration centres. As part of the mapping the region's 'conflict areas' were soon highlighted—identified as Buluk, Sabare and Darate. After the mapping a baseline survey was conducted, in which data on the issues that the project was due to address—the nutritional status of the population, the effectiveness of existing animal health care services, levels and patterns of trade, the existence of emergency plans, the functioning of social support structures, the status of livestock and the vulnerability of local community members—was collected. Again, the baseline survey quickly revealed considerable information on the levels of conflict, the reasons behind the differences between the various ethnic groups, and the impact this was having on the availability of water and forage resources. It was at this stage that the 'Do No Harm' approach became a part of the process.

The first 'Do No Harm' workshop was conducted in Buluk, at one of the disputed locations between the two communities, with a small group of selected Gabbra and the Dasanach participants—plus the local programme staff for whom the concept was also new. A few weeks later a second workshop brought together more than 60 people for three days at Sabare, strategically located at the Kenyan-Ethiopian border in the 'no man's land' between the Dasanach and the Gabbra on the Kenyan side, and within easy reach for Hamar, Albore and Borana on the Ethiopian side. The security of the representatives from the various ethnic groups was guaranteed by the presence of a unit of the Kenyan police. The feedback from the two workshops was immensely positive, as was its impact on the relationships between the various groups. Not only were reciprocal grazing agreements reached, but cross-border committees and also water user associations were established.



The 'Do No Harm' approach is usually presented as a sequence of ten separate modules, but not all of these are equally useful to all audiences. In this ICRD project seven of the steps were undertaken:

Step 1: Understanding the context

This step aims at understanding the magnitude of the different conflict issues, the extent to which differences have turned into wide-spread violence, the causes of conflict, the different levels of conflict that take place at the same time, as well as the affected locations and people. In Buluk and Sabare the sessions on the context of the conflict created opportunities to learn from each other, to understand causes and actions, and to recognize existing mechanisms for conflict resolution.

Steps 2 and 3: Analysis of relationships

These two steps analyse the relationships between two groups involved in a violent conflict. This analysis of 'dividers' and 'connectors' is often done using a case study from a distant setting—so participants don't feel personally involved in the underlying context of conflict. But in Buluk and in Sabare the analysis turned straight to the sensitive issues of conflict between the different ethnic groups present, which, whilst challenging the facilitator, identified the existence of shared resources and made everyone realise that their future development required their cooperation.

Step 4: Unpacking the programme components

In this step the details of a proposed aid programme are looked at, on the basis that any relief or development intervention brought into a situation of violent conflict becomes a part of that context and might have a positive or negative impact. In Buluk the participants had no experience of project planning so the step was not useful. The step was left out completely in Sabare.

Step 5: Interaction between aid and conflict

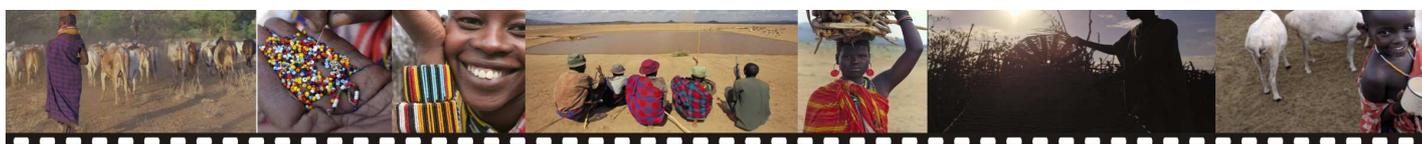
This step helps programme planners and implementers to understand the mechanisms through which their decisions or behaviour interact with the two sides of the conflict—the interaction taking place through the effects of resource transfers or through implicit ethical messages. This step was well understood by the participants who cited local examples from Ileret about the influence of food aid on market prices, as well as the consequences of targeting particular groups or specific individuals, the diversion of resources, and the undermining of self-help capacities.

Steps 6 and 7: Developing options

The last steps are used when activities show signs of negative side effects, and focus on the redesign of the programme and the testing of options. Here the methodology was used as a brainstorming exercise on possible actions that the programme could adopt to promote the linkages between the various communities. They included: agreements on reciprocal use of pasture areas; joint rehabilitation / construction of wells to be built by artisans from both communities; construction of shared markets; establishment of a joint training centre; building of shared churches and mosques; and starting sport activities and exchange programmes.

Participatory methods

In conjunction with the 'Do No Harm' approach VSF followed a clearly-defined strategy of participatory development using a number of participatory planning tools: As well as the initial resource use maps, proportionate scoring matrices and pair-wise ranking were used to determine which problems were the most serious; Listening, negotiation, bargaining and self-actualisation/discovery skills were applied at community meetings held in



preparation for the inter-community meetings; A seasonal calendar was helpful in understanding the seasonal fluctuations in workload, in scarcity of food and water, in availability of income opportunities, or with regard to the occurrence of diseases; Wealth ranking gave an insight into the social stratification within the pastoralist communities in the area; And finally community action plans were developed during community planning meetings to allow the members of the local pastoralist population to take ownership of the development process.

Challenges

The 'Do No Harm' process requires a considerable level of preparation. A close understanding of the socio-cultural and economic conditions is needed, as are skills in building trust and negotiating. The facilitation must ensure there is no 'pin-pointing' at particular groups or individuals, and achieve gender balance—often difficult in pastoralist environments where peace meetings tend to be dominated by men.³ The need for good prior training is essential for all project staff who need to implement project activities in a conflict-sensitive way, even if their core expertise is in veterinary health care, livestock marketing or water management.

The two workshops held by the ICRD project were a particular logistical challenge to the programme management. It was discovered in retrospect that two days (in Buluk, involving twenty people from two communities) or even three days (in Sabare, involving sixty people from five communities) was too short to achieve a deep understanding of the subject. The low levels of education, the sensitivity of the subject, and the fact that every contribution has to be translated (sometimes into several other languages) requires a slow pace adapted to the audience.

Achievements

Workshops will often end with an ambitious plan presented during the closing ceremony that is forgotten before the participants reach their homes. But in the case of the Gabbra and the Dasanach the result was not just a non-binding agreement; instead the communities used the momentum of the meetings to start real activities on the ground with the support of the VSF staff. Five shallow wells were rehabilitated (deepened, lined and capped) and five troughs constructed in Kadite and Buluk grazing areas to ease tension between the Dasanach and the Gabbra. The livestock and human population continue to get water from these rehabilitated wells and pumps, with most water points being served by 3000 to 5000 cattle and 2000 sheep and goats on daily basis. Eight artisans were also trained in well capping, lining and trough making, with exchange visits exposing the water artisans from Dasanach community to other communities dealing with water related problems⁴.

In addition, as a consequence of the peace agreement, three months of peace were immediately secured between the two communities, during which pasture and water was shared and the loss of livestock drastically reduced. The retaliation that would previously have been an automatic response was now being replaced by negotiations. The success story of the Buluk experience apparently spread quickly, with herders in Surge reporting that a group of Hamar had approached them in order to reach a similar agreement and use the water around the Kenyan-Ethiopian border jointly. Further evidence of the level of trust that developed through the workshops occurred when

³ Surprisingly, the workshop participants concluded that women, although not being involved in the actual fighting, had played a big role in promoting hostilities. The traditional cultural patterns of reverence for bravery and physical strength, and the tradition of demanding high bride prices in heads of cattle, has led to an idolisation of the "warrior", and women were seen as major inciters.

⁴ Githinji & Mursal (2009) Community Response to Drought (ICRD) Project Final Evaluation, August 2009



members of the water users associations and the peace committees from the Gabbra and the Dasanach communities met at Buluk for a regular follow-up meeting and decided to stay there overnight. This was a daring decision, which would have threatened their lives under conditions of conflict. Although not all of this can be attributed to the 'Do No Harm' approach, the combination of conflict-sensitive planning, participatory community development approaches, and elements of direct peace building has together achieved these results.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Working in pastoralist environments very often means working in situations with difficult environmental and climatic conditions, where people are struggling for survival upon limited natural resources. The particular pattern of livelihoods in pastoralist communities requires a high degree of mobility in order to make optimal use of scarce resources, which at the same time makes an uninterrupted supply of social services from the side of the respective government institutions difficult. As a result such communities very often feel marginalized, and dependent on finding their own solutions for their various social and economic problems. As environmental changes directly affect the livelihoods of pastoralist communities they are highly vulnerable to climatic events, such as droughts and floods, which then lead to further competition over scarce resources. Consequently most pastoralist environments are also marked by a high degree of inter-ethnic conflict, in which the access to water and pastures becomes a continuous object of tension. Relief and development projects working in such situations have to be aware of these aspects and assure that their interventions, whether in the form of social services, economic assistance or infrastructure, are implemented in a conflict-sensitive way. Specific recommendations for doing so are as follows:

- **Take an explicit decision to integrate conflict-sensitivity into programming.**

Instead of retreating from areas of insecurity, or neglecting the impact of conflict on a particular project, relief and development organizations should take a pro-active step and consider the conflict environment in their programming decisions. Focusing on sector competence alone, or shelving violent conflict under 'risks and assumptions', is not the answer.

- **Determine the steps for an accompanying process for staff—from training to practical application.**

Working in situations of violent conflict requires specific knowledge and skills for project staff. Conflict-sensitive approaches like 'Do No Harm' can be understood after attendance of an introductory workshop, but without ongoing training many people struggle with the implementation in the field.

- **Develop conflict-sensitive indicators for measuring the success of a project.**

Peace building is by definition a qualitative process, and specific indicators measuring its achievements are difficult to determine. However it is important that the conflict-sensitive aspects of programming are also reflected as a measurable outcome, which—depending on the particular project activities—can be a challenging task for programme planners.

- **Decide on guidelines for the organisational presence in the field.**

Organisations should be prepared to spend some time reflecting how they would like to be perceived in an environment of violent conflict. This could involve, for example, the adaptation of guidelines and procedures, the adherence to a code of conduct, and an induction process for new staff etc.

- **Take an informed decision on whether peace building should become an objective in itself.**

While 'Do No Harm' tries to make sure that projects don't have any negative side effects on the conflict situation, it does not address the *causes* for the tensions in a particular context. For this purpose, specific peace-building tools would need to be applied and 'peace' would need to be established as a separate project objective.



References

ANDERSON, M. (1999) Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – or War, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London

GRAFE, JENET & OBALA, (2011) Planning in Conflict: Experiences with the conflict-sensitive programming approach 'Do No Harm' in pastoralist settings.

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Humanitarian Aid

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