



Lesson 13

Conflict Assessment Tools

Learning Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

- Identify six tools for conflict assessment
- Determine which tool to use to answer six questions related to conflict.

This lesson provides a set of six tools or lenses useful in conflict assessment. These include the *Where, Who, Why, What, How, and When* questions that journalists often use when investigating a story. Illustrative tools and participatory processes outlined in the last lesson help to improve the quality of conflict assessment research.

This lesson is adapted from the book Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning.⁵⁷

1. Conflict assessment requires robust research

There are many different conflict assessment frameworks. The framework offered in this lesson is a synthesis of the types of questions found in most conflict assessment frameworks. There are six interrelated lines of inquiry related to understanding conflict.

Where is the conflict taking place - in what cultural, social, economic, justice, and political context or system?

Who are the stakeholders - the people who have a stake or interest in the conflict?

Why are the stakeholders acting the way they do? What are their motivations?

What factors are driving or mitigating conflict?

How is conflict manifested? What are the stakeholders' means and sources of power?

When does conflict take place? Are historical patterns or cycles of the conflict evident?

The purpose in this lesson is to gain familiarity with the basic six questions that guide any conflict assessment. There are many conflict analysis tools or conflict assessment “lenses” to help answer each question. This lesson introduces only one lens for each question to provide an introduction to conflict assessment.

2. Context Lens: Where is the conflict taking place?

In any complex environment, there are “dividers” and “connectors.”⁵⁸ **Connectors** refer to everything that links people across conflict lines, particularly those forces that meet human needs. **Dividers** are tensions or fault lines that refer to those forces that alienate people or interrupt their human needs. Dividers include sources of conflict, or the issues in conflict.

Connectors		Dividers
List of Connectors that links people across conflict lines, particularly those forces that meet human needs	<i>Design programmes that decrease the dividers and increase the connectors between groups</i>	List of Dividers or the tensions or fault lines that divide people or interrupt their human needs

Figure 32: Connectors and Dividers Analysis Tool

An intervention should be “**conflict sensitive**” and “**do no harm**” by reducing the possibility that it could have unintended consequences or second order effects that would increase divisions between groups and increase the likelihood of violence. An intervention also should foster resilience by increasing the connectors between groups. The purpose of this lens is to examine the broad context of connectors and dividers that exist within a society. There are five categories of connectors and dividers.

Systems and institutions: Systems and institutions—like markets, power lines, water pipes, bridges, roads and communications systems—can connect people across conflict lines. If systems and institutions serve some people and not others, they may increase divisions between groups. For example, if oil pipelines travel through a community but the community does not benefit from the pipelines, the pipelines are an example of a “divider.”

Attitudes and actions: Even in the midst of war and violence, some individuals behave in surprising ways, such as adopting abandoned children from the opposing side in the conflict or continuing a community soccer group across the lines of conflict. Attitudes and actions can be “connectors” helping groups see the humanity of those on the other side of the conflict. Other people can display hateful behaviours, write graffiti or call people names on the other sides of a conflict. Attitudes and actions can either divide or connect people.

Shared values and interests: Shared religious or moral values, such as a belief in protecting children or the environment, can connect people across the lines of conflict. UNICEF, for example, has negotiated days of tranquillity in conflict zones based upon the shared value warring parties placed on inoculating children against disease.

Common experiences: The experience and effects of war on individuals can provide linkages across conflict lines. Citing the experience of war and suffering as “common to all sides,” people traumatised by war sometimes create new anti-war alliances across conflict lines. In other situations, a common experience of trauma can divide people, as each group is unable to function emotionally.

Symbols and occasions: National art, music, historical anniversaries, national holidays,

CONNECTORS AND DIVIDERS EXERCISE

1. Draw the table above and make a list of dividers and connectors in the local context. If some forces are listed as both connectors and dividers, try to qualify them. For example, if “water” is listed in both categories ask the group “Why? It could be that wells are connectors, as communities share these public spaces. But lack of water for farmers may be a divider, as community members involved in agriculture don’t have enough water to irrigate their crops.
2. What projects support the connectors? Which efforts increase the dividers?
3. If you work for an organisation, how would you redesign or change the work to increase connectors and reduce the dividers?

monuments, and sporting events (e.g., the Olympics) can divide people by prompting memories of past traumatic events, bring people together or link them across conflict lines, or some combination of the two.

3. Stakeholder Lens: Who is driving the conflict, and who is supporting peace?

In Lesson 1, this *Handbook* described the process of stakeholder mapping. This is an example of an analytical tool to organise information related to the second question of “Who is driving conflict and who is supporting peace.” Stakeholder mapping can also include categorising stakeholders according to their characteristics. In the chart below, stakeholders can be rated on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being low level and 10 being high level.

- Identify stakeholders that contribute to conflict and violence.
- Rate those that contribute to human security. Some stakeholders are simultaneously increasing conflict or violence while also asserting a desire to improve human security.
- Rate stakeholders who have high or low levels of legitimacy with other stakeholders and a significant or insignificant capacity to influence change.
- Rate stakeholder’s capacity to contribute (their expertise, funding, local knowledge, language capacity)

Stakeholder Analysis				
Stakeholders	Level of negative impact on violence	Level of positive impact on human security	Level of legitimacy on other stakeholders and capacity to influence change	Capacity to contribute and willingness to get involved in

Figure 33: Stakeholder Analysis Chart Tool

4. Motivation Lens: Why are the key actors motivated to drive violence or mitigate conflict?

People engage in conflict for various reasons. These motivations range from illegitimate greed to legitimate grievances. People often decide to fight and die to protect their basic human needs for dignity, respect, identity, and economic and physical safety.

Stakeholder mapping can help to analyse each stakeholder’s motivations, including their needs, interests and positions.

Stakeholder Motivations			
Stakeholders	Needs or grievances	Interests	Positions

Figure 34: Stakeholder Motivation Analysis Tool

People’s motivations for engaging in peacebuilding efforts to mitigate conflict are also diverse. In the “onion” diagram here, needs and interests are often hidden underneath public positions.

Positions are what people say they want in public. These can be political demands or conditions under which they will stop fighting.

Interests are desires, concerns, and fears that drive people to develop a public position.

Needs are the most basic material, social, and cultural requirements for life that drive people’s behaviour and their positions and interests.

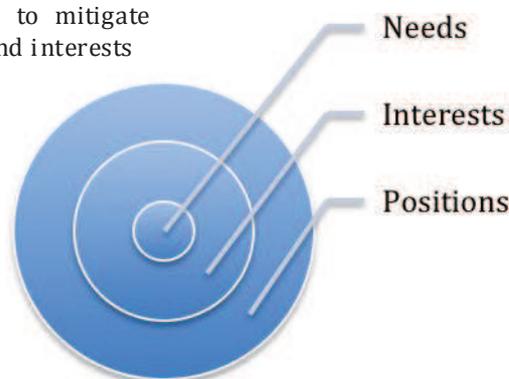


Figure 35: Onion Analysis Tool

There is no evidence of a hierarchy of needs⁵⁹ (some may remember Maslow’s pyramid of human needs). Context seems to shape which of these takes precedence over others. Some people may be willing to give

up their need to eat, but not their need to exercise their religion. Others may be willing to sacrifice their lives, but not their identity and dignity.

The drive to satisfy core human needs shapes human behaviour. Conflict occurs when people perceive that others are obstructing or threatening their needs and rights. Depending on how threatened people feel, they may be willing to fight, die, or harm others to satisfy their needs. People fight to preserve their sense of identity just as much if not more than to obtain power or resources. Threats and punishments are ineffective at changing the behaviour of people trying to satisfy what they perceive to be their basic human needs.⁶⁰ Negotiation processes help people identify underlying needs and rights to develop creative solutions.

Human needs and human rights are similar. People have a “right” to what they “need”; including food, water, shelter, education as well as dignity and respect for their right to life.⁶¹ People may satisfy their needs in different ways. People “need” and have a right to food and shelter. They may take a *position* that they must have a certain type of food or shelter. Positions are not rights.

- *Material needs and rights* include basic physical safety, food, shelter, health care, and the necessary resources to survive physically.
- *Social needs and rights* include a sense of dignity, respect, recognition from others, belonging to a group while having a sense of participation, and self-determination in decisions that affect one’s life.
- *Cultural needs and rights* include finding meaning in one’s own identity, through cultural and religious beliefs that help people make sense of the world.

Core grievances develop from a deep sense of frustration that emerges out of persistent social patterns that obstruct human needs. Grievances emerge as people perceive a social pattern of *discrimination or exclusion of some groups* in favour of an elite group. Grievances shape people’s perceptions of what they see as just and fair. Sometimes these grievances look illegitimate to others. People experience justice as a satisfaction of these basic human needs.

Greed is a term that refers to people who meet their own interests at the expense of others. For example, some armed groups use violence to take resources away from other groups so that they can increase their own personal wealth and finance further armed struggle. Sometimes people act in ways that harm others in an effort to defend or achieve their needs. Greed may stem from material shortages, perceived economic interests or “internalised superiority.” Some people *perceive* that their lives are worth more than others, and therefore it is “just” for them to have more resources and power. This *internalised superiority* develops from cultural values and is shaped by one’s sense of identity of self and other. Most people view themselves as good and their own motivations as legitimate. People tend to avoid seeing their own actions as greedy. Instead, they justify the reasons for their actions, describing them as legitimate grievances.

5. Drivers Lens: What are the drivers of violence and what can be done to impact them?

Root causes are the broad institutional and structural factors that create an environment where violent conflict is possible. Economic inequality, for example, is a root cause of many violent conflicts. “Conflict drivers” are the immediate triggers that increase the possibility of violent conflict. Climate change or environmental shocks such as droughts that destroy crops, the abundant supply of cheap weapons, or violent extremists who use religion to gain recruits are each examples of conflict drivers.

In many cultures, there are types of trees or plants such as the cassava plant or the raspberry bush that regenerate even after their tops are cut off. These plants are a metaphor to illustrate the ability for “roots” to regenerate and spread, despite efforts to eliminate them.

ONION ANALYSIS EXERCISE

1. Draw the table “stakeholder motivations” or the “onion” diagram.
2. Identify a list of key stakeholders based on the stakeholder analysis above.
3. What are the positions, interests, or underlying needs that motivate each of the key stakeholders?

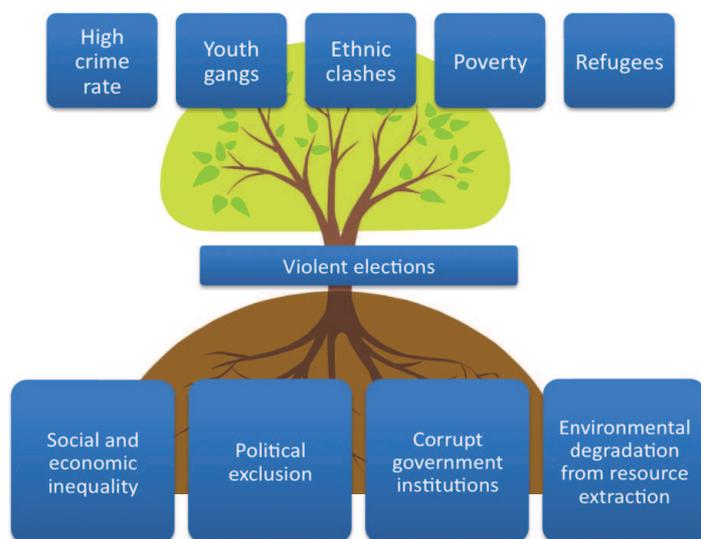


Figure 36: Tree Analysis Tool

The tree below illustrates this. Efforts to address the presenting issues without addressing the latent root causes will have little effect on the system. Sustainable peacebuilding requires addressing root causes. For example, Figure 35 illustrates social and economic inequality and government corruption as root causes of violent elections. The branches of the tree are symptoms of the root causes. These symptoms also fuel more conflict and violence. It is important to address the conflict drivers of violent elections include a high crime rate, youth gangs and ethnic clashes. But addressing these factors might not change the underlying structural conditions or root causes of election violence.

Another metaphor to understand the relationship between factors causing violent conflict is to think of violent conflict as a fire. The firewood is the root cause, such as political exclusion of one group in society. Gasoline and the match that lights the fire are the conflict drivers, the factors that cause a fire to erupt, such as a drought that makes it difficult for people to feed their families. The smoke from the fire is the violence that is seen. Some analysts, for example, see violent extremists as the “smoke” and not the “fire.” They suggest addressing political governance and economic issues are essential to preventing violent extremism.

When analysing the root causes and drivers of violence, it is also important to identify threats to and vulnerabilities of civilians. Civilians themselves need to be part of any process to assess these risks and vulnerabilities. Where do people feel unsafe? What will help them address these vulnerabilities? Preventing mass atrocities requires using an “atrocities lens” to identify potential signs that a group is preparing to carry out mass atrocities against civilian populations. A conflict assessment can identify the context, stakeholders, motivations, means, and methods and timing of a potential atrocity (where, who, why, how, what, and when). This assessment can provide an “early warning” that a crisis is impending and requires preventive diplomacy or other intervention.

6. Power Lens: How are key actors using power to drive or mitigate conflict?

There are many sources of power. Stakeholders in a conflict can mobilise any of these sources as a means to fight others, given they have access to them. People can also use or create these sources of power in peacebuilding efforts.

- Physical or military strength
- Identity (gender, ethnic background, family of origin, position, or authority)
- Personal ability (such as communication skills or professional competency)
- Economic resources
- Information
- Education (knowledge and skills)
- Moral or spiritual power
- The personal power of charisma
- Social capital, including networking abilities, relationships with others, and the ability to mobilise masses

Social capital refers to the quantity and quality of relationships between people and groups. It is based on the idea that social networks have value.

Balanced and Unbalanced Power: People often have different levels of power in conflict-affected systems. People can feel disempowered, as if they have no or little power, when they have a difficult time influencing decisions that affect their lives. People tend to feel especially disempowered when they are not consulted or included in a social process that affects their lives, when others devalue their right or

ability to participate in that process, or when they feel that they can have no impact on the world and that death is inevitable.

Misperceptions of who has the “most” power are frequent. People tend to become angry and threaten others when they sense others have more power. Assessing the power each stakeholder has to influence other stakeholders requires a thorough understanding of their degree of interdependence. The power of any stakeholder is related to how dependent others are on him or her. The power of A over B is equal to the dependence that B has on A and vice versa.

Domination and Control versus Sharing Power

Power over is the *destructive* use of power to impact and influence others’ lives without their consent. Domination, control, submission, defiance, threats, and counter-threats are examples of “power over” strategies. They suggest, “If you do not do what I want, I will do something you do not want.” Attempts to dominate over others often are drivers of conflict. Most human beings want to participate in decisions that affect their lives. This is why democratic governance is considered the most stable form of government. When a dictator or armed force imposes and controls other groups of people, those people almost always resist in a violent insurgency or nonviolent social movement.

Power with is the *constructive* use of power to shape the environment with others’ consent and participation. Productive power is the power to do and create things and the power with others based on exchange relationships that suggest, “If you do something I want, I will do something you want,” or integrative power to create something with others, such as “I will do something because I care about your well-being.” These forms of power are conflict mitigators. When people work together to solve problems with the goal of achieving a “win-win” solution that meets everyone’s underlying interests and needs, sustainable peace is possible.

A government’s political power, for example, ultimately depends on the consent and cooperation of its citizens. All governments depend upon the cooperation of others to participate and consent to governance. The more citizens deny a government’s authority and legitimacy, the less power that government can exercise.

7. Timeline Lens: When has the conflict been less or more challenging in the past? Will the conflict be less or more challenging in the future?

In a complex environment, groups of people often have completely different experiences and perceptions of history. Research on how different groups perceive history illustrates that different lived experiences shape the worldviews of groups interpreting history. Not all groups remember historic facts the same way. Some groups focus on chosen traumas where their group suffered and chosen glories where their group prevailed.⁶²

The timeline lens illustrates how different stakeholders understand the significant points in history. The goal of using the timeline lens is not to detect the “correct” or “objective” version of history but to understand people’s perceptions of past events. People generally remember the things that have affected them, had an impact on their lives, or shaped their worldviews. People on opposing sides of the conflict emphasise different events, describe history with different narratives or stories, and attach contrasting emotions to events. This lens helps people understand how different stakeholders view history. Developing a timeline of the history of the conflict enables stakeholders to identify those moments in the conflict that created a sense of “trauma” or “glory” for a group. A “trauma” is an event or series of events that caused significant disruption and pain. A “glory” is something that groups are proud of and are important to the group. This process of analysing the emotional impact of past events may also help stakeholders of opposing groups to understand more about the psychological impact particular memories may have had on the other group and they may perhaps more readily be able to acknowledge and even apologise.

POWER ANALYSIS EXERCISE

1. What are the key stakeholder’s different sources of power and social capital?
2. How are the stakeholders in the conflict dependent upon each other? Are they interdependent or does one side have more influence on the others?
3. How does power play into the dynamics of the conflict? In what ways do stakeholders use power as a means to wage conflict with each other?

This lens can also identify potential future “windows of vulnerability.” For example, if violence often happens during elections, a timeline can highlight the potential danger for times in the future when elections are held. The lens can also identify “windows of opportunity” when there may be opportunities for peace, such as anniversaries or sports events that bring people together.

TIMELINE EXERCISE

Ideally a timeline is constructed in a large group made up of key stakeholders from different sides of the conflict. This process brings the most insight into symbolic meaning attached to events by different groups.

1. Divide the group according to the various “sides,” key actors, or identity groups in a conflict.
2. Ask people in each small group to share the major events that have shaped how they see the conflict today. They can start as far back in history as they want to begin telling their story of what has happened.
3. Write a brief, three- to five-word summary of each significant historical event, moment of glory, or moment of trauma on a separate sheet of paper.
4. The facilitator will lay down a line of rope or tape on the floor to mark the line of history along with sheets of paper to mark dates along the timeline. Each side of the conflict will lay down the history in chronological order along the rope line. The historical dates need to be marked so that each group’s chronology matches up along the line.
5. When each group is finished laying out their key historic dates, ask everyone to silently walk along the line and read each side’s understanding of history. Note how each side remembers different events and has a different interpretation of events as traumatic or as a glory.
6. After everyone finishes silently observing the timeline, reconfigure small groups made up of different identity groups. Ask them to share with each other what they noticed in terms of commonly perceived events versus differences in perceptions. Allow space for people to ask questions of each other about their different perceptions.
7. Identify the key points in history where there are shared memories and key points where there are disparate memories in which one side’s trauma may be the other side’s glory. How can these memories create opportunities for transforming the current crisis by memorialising, acknowledging and/or apologising for past events?

REVIEW

This lesson provided six tools or lenses for conducting a conflict assessment research process. The tools help to identify the Where, Who, Why, What, How and When related to a specific conflict.

Citations

⁵⁷ Lisa Schirch, *Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning: Toward a Participatory Approach to Human Security*, (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2014).

⁵⁸ *The “Do No Harm” Framework for Analyzing the Impact of Assistance on Conflict: A Handbook*, (Boston, Massachusetts: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2004).

⁵⁹ John Burton, *Conflict: Human Needs Theory* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990).

⁶⁰ James Gilligan, *Preventing Violence* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001).

⁶¹ Lisa Schirch, “Linking Human Rights and Conflict Transformation: A Peacebuilding Perspective,” in *Human Rights and Conflict: Exploring the Links Between Rights, Law, and Peacebuilding*, edited by Julie Mertus and Jeffrey Helsing (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2006), 63–95.

⁶² See Vamik D. Volcan, *The Need for Enemies and Allies: From Clinical Practice to International Relationships* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson Publishers, 1988).

Lesson 13

Learning Exercises

Anchor

10 minutes

To begin the lesson, anchor the content in this lesson with an open question:

- What are five different things you need to know about a conflict in order to understand it?

Add

20 minutes

Present the PowerPoint slides or ask participants to discuss the lesson readings in a small group.

Apply

25 minutes

The goal of this exercise is to practice using conflict assessment tools to improve understanding of conflict dynamics. Create “research teams” with one person from each stakeholder team. Each team should choose one conflict assessment lens and practice it. For example, one group will do a lens to explain the Where, Who, Why, What, How or When lens. If the group has not done stakeholder map (see Lesson 1) then this should be included here. If there are not enough stakeholder teams, then eliminate one of the lenses. If there are too many stakeholder teams, then two teams can do the same lens and compare if they are similar or different. Each team can present their tool to the other groups. This exercise potentially could use a full hour or more. Facilitators will either need to be strict time keepers or shorten another lesson to allow for more time on this.

See the “Scenario-based Learning” section in the [Handbook on Human Security: A Civil-Military-Police Curriculum](#) for explanation of the scenarios and teams.

Away

5 minutes

To end the lesson, the trainer can ask participants to divide into groups of 2 or 3 people. Participants can share with each other their reflections on this lesson.

This Lesson is part of the *Handbook on Human Security* found at www.humansecuritycoordination.org

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