

Nepal-Based Aid Organizations and Their Conflict-Sensitivity Commitments

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Abstract

Background: The words ‘conflict sensitivity’ recognize foreign aid as an element having capacity to contribute to peace and conflict based on implementation approaches of aid-driven projects. Aid recipient countries in the world host several international organizations - bilateral and multilaterals, international NGOs and private sector companies that are supposed to support humanitarian, development and peacebuilding interventions.

Area Covered: This paper examines the conflict-sensitivity commitments of such aid-related international organizations who provide foreign aid, or implement internationally funded activities in Nepal. International organizations discussed in this paper are chosen from Gorkha district considering the facts of conflict-affected situation of the district and concentration of international organizations there after the 2015’s mega-earthquake in Nepal. Thus conflict-sensitivity commitments of the organizations covered by this research are reviewed through publicly available reports and policy documents, and were validated with key informant interviews considering employees and beneficiary communities’ representatives. Descriptive analysis approach was followed for qualitative data analysis.

Expert Opinion: The findings revealed that most of the international organizations have embraced conflict-sensitivity principles, approaches and tools in their policies. In Nepal, particularly in the context of Gorkha, common ‘Basic Operating Guidelines-BOGs’ of international organizations and agency specific approaches are widely evident. But, commitment levels are entirely distinct from agency to agency. It applies equally among the bilateral donors, multilateral organizations and implementing NGOs. Most of private sector companies lack this commitment even though their presence in Nepal is increasing. Funding agencies require critical attention on how their implementing partners, especially the private sector, are fulfilling conflict-sensitivity standards in their policies.

Keywords: Aid organizations, Commitments, Conflict analysis, Conflict-sensitivity, Do-no-harm

1 Introduction

Violent conflict is long recognized as one of the causes of unsustainable development and the fact is explicitly described in the UN mandated Brundtland Commission’s report (WCED, 1987). Failure to provision smooth development services to its citizens by a state (Upreti, 2004) and persistent inequalities between power seeking populations (Stewart, 2002) are some critical causes responsible leading a country into internal conflict or complex humanitarian emergencies. In this context Conflict sensitivity is emerged as a new area of practice considering ‘aid’ factor that can contribute to exacerbation of violent conflict, or can pose negative impacts on conflict situation. Hence, conflict sensitivity is defined as an ability of the organizations to understand the conflict context in which it operates; understand the interaction between the organizations’ interventions and the context and acting upon the understanding of this interaction in order to avoid negative impacts and maximize the positive impacts (Haider, 2014a) of humanitarian, development or peacebuilding interventions.

Conflict sensitivity concept urges the aid organizations to work differently in the conflict prone, or conflict affected environment than in a normal situation, also because of the fact that overseas development assistance (ODA) globally constitutes more than 200 billion USD a year (OECD, 2022). An estimate presents that about 42,000 international organizations from the world are actively working in aid sector while 74,000 such organizations are registered in the record (UIA, 2020). The figure includes both the intergovernmental (IGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). The Union of International Associations (UIA) estimates approximately 1,200 new organizations are added each year. Since early 2000s, the ODA providers of the world called Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is organizing high level political forums to discuss and agree on aid effectiveness gateways and conflict sensitivity has been kept in a focus.

Nepal being of one of aid recipient countries as well as a conflict-affected country- hard hit by the politically motivated armed-conflict between 1996 and 2006 and indulged in frequently erupting local conflicts on different

issues. Nepal hosts diplomatic missions of 25 foreign countries and the European Union (GoN/MoFA, n.d.) and most of them provide foreign assistance on different priorities. Additional multilateral agencies such as United Nations (UN) Organizations, the World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), International Labor Organization (ILO) etc. are operating their assistance in the country signing agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Large portion of foreign assistance has been channeled through International NGOs who have done project agreements with the Social Welfare Council (SWC), Nepal. More than 200 INGOs are active in the country with SWC's affiliation (SWC, 2020). They make downstream agreement with the nationally/locally registered organizations as implementing partners. In recent years, international private sector organizations are also operating in humanitarian and development affairs having registered at the office of the company registrar of Nepal. But their numbers and operational status seems quite ambiguous.

When Nepal was undergoing through the armed conflict between 1996 and 2006, many of the international aid providing agencies agreed on basic operating guidelines (BOGs) in 2003 to express their commitments to conflict-sensitive aid provisions in the country. The fundamental principles of impartiality, transparency, accountability and inclusion were explicitly expressed in the BOGs (United Nations, Nepal, 2018) making it more significant to work in conflict-affected situations. Despite that not all aid providers were the signatories of those guidelines. To apply BOG commitments in practice, aid agencies are applying various tools and techniques such as Safe and Effective Development Tools (RMO, 2010); a Peacebuilding Tool for a Conflict-Sensitive Approach to Development (ADB, 2012a); Comprehensive and credible conflict-sensitive programme management - CSPM (SDC, 2005) and so on.

At this juncture, this research through an in-depth assessment of conflict-sensitivity commitments of Nepal based aid organizations attempted to provide a bit clear picture on how strongly the international aid-sector organizations have formulated their policies and programmed their interventions so that they do not contribute to further worsen the conflict affected contexts and their contributions would be more effective to better off the situations.

2 Materials and methods

This research mostly relies on review of published sources of information, basically the policy documents, reports, and publicly available contents on different medias. However, information are triangulated by interviewing relevant key informants (n=23) consisting of international organizations' senior and mid-level managers as well as the representatives of beneficiary communities. To bring a precision on analysis, Gorkha district (Gandaki Province) of central Nepal was considered for two key reasons (i) it is one of the highly affected districts during the armed conflict led by CPN (Maoists), and (ii) It is epicenter of 2015 mega-earthquake for which reason numbers of international aid agencies focused their activities in the district from emergency support to post-earthquake reconstruction and recovery (OCHA, 2015). This provided an opportunity to cover as much as organizations within a small territory. Before commencing the review of policy commitments of international organizations, a mapping exercise of international organization's presence was carried out in the Gorkha district by visiting and consulting with the local intellects including journalists and political leaders.

Qualitative information collected during the study period were subjected to analyze in a descriptive way.

3 Results/Findings

3.1 Landscape of aid organizations in the study area, Gorkha, Nepal

INGOs (27)	Build Change, Care Nepal, Christian Aid, CRS, DCA, Equal Access, FHI360, GNI, Handicap International, Hellen Keller International, INF, Helvetas, LWR, LWF, Mercy Corps, Mountain Child, OXFAM, PACT World, PIN, Practical Action, Raleigh International, Samaritan Purse, Save the Children, SNV, Transparency International, World Vision, WWF
Private Sector Organizations (2)	Mott MacDonald, Adam Smith International
Intergovernmental Organizations (3)	UNDP, UNICEF, UNOPS
Unknown legal status (3)	AFPN France, Gorkha Welfare Trust, Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Association, Big Lottery Fund
Multilateral Organizations (2)	World Bank, ADB
Donors (6)	USAid, DFID, Govt. of India, JICA, SDC, GIZ, European Union

Source: Field survey, 2021

During the filed visits, at least below mentioned international organizations were identified in the district

either currently working, or those who had marked some footprints in last thirty years period. The interview inferences and observation in the field indicates the number of agencies having local footprint in Gorkha should be much higher than the above list, but their correct names and other details were not found in absence of reliable published data-source and memory among the interview participants (key informants). Also, some of agencies listed in table could not be tracked in the SWC affiliated list, or in relevant publications of the Ministry of Finance creating a challenge to verify their legal ground to operate in the country.

3.2 Conflict sensitivity policy commitments of bilateral aid providers

'Conflict sensitivity consortium', a UK-Aid funded consortium of 16-international organizations issued a policy brief for donor organizations suggesting them to consider conflict-sensitivity in: (i) **funding instruments and mechanisms** by analyzing the risks entrenching conflict drivers and governance problems (ii) **each stage of project cycle** by ensuring inclusion of CS principles from the proposal stage and (iii) **Among implementing partners** by providing institutional funding so that partner have developed skills and capacities on conflict sensitivity (Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, 2012a). Donors are further recommended to integrate conflict sensitivity in their programs, policies and systems starting from conflict analysis, supporting to build up capacities of staffers and partners and perform collaborating works among the government ministries and departments who are possible to engage in conflict affected countries and situations (Schmeidl, Ware, & Alberti, 2023). Those recommendations are largely covered in donor's commitments. However, individual donor's priorities appear distinct from one to another as evidenced in below descriptions:

3.2.1 UK Government/FCDO (former DFID¹)

Conflict sensitivity tools and guidelines published by the UK Government's Stabilization Unit (HMG, 2016) intends at minimum to 'minimize harm' in local communities due to its interventions and at maximum to 'directly and deliberately address the drivers of conflict' depending on the type of engagements in specific areas. UK government's guideline aims to apply conflict sensitivity with four-interlinked steps with accompanying tools. As such, first stage encompasses 'conflict analysis' for which they use questions for program level conflict analysis. To augment their conflict analysis, different government departments or offices use at least twelve different kinds of 'conflict analysis' tools (HMG, 2016; Stabilisation Unit, 2017; Almeida & Harris, 2021). At the second stage they conduct conflict sensitivity review and adjustment by using a review checklist for program design. The third stage is conflict sensitive implementation for which they use log-frame driven checklist for conflict sensitivity of implementing partners as an accompanying tool. And, the fourth stage consists of Conflict Sensitivity monitoring and at this stage they use checklist for conflict-sensitivity within monitoring and evaluation plans.

UK Government's policy guideline widely incorporates the advices and recommendations including the tools and methodologies prescribed by Conflict Sensitivity Consortium (2012a; 2012b). Besides, their guidelines adopt the Do-No-Harm Framework (Anderson, 2000) and Conflict Sensitivity Topic Guide (Haider, 2014a) as useful guiding documents for conflict sensitivity application. As part of the government's global women peace and security commitments, they wish to integrate the gender issues and apply gender related guidance simultaneously with the conflict sensitivity guidance (HMG, 2016). The reflections obtained from the key informants related to FCDO's operations in Nepal signifies that the UK government considers application of conflict sensitivity being context specific to the working environment where it operates. In Nepal's current context, they provide strategic focus to safeguarding the project's human and physical resources and beneficiaries closely engaging with all tiers of the governments.

3.2.2 USAid (US Development Agency)

USAID has developed a Conflict Assessment Framework (CAF) to help their missions and field offices better evaluate the risks of armed conflict, understand the peace and security goals that are most important in a given context (USAID, 2012). They consider conflict assessment is an analytical process undertaken to identify and understand the dynamics of violence and instability in a given country context (Schwoebel, et al., 2004), whereby conflict assessment is the first step in designing programs that effectively address the causes and consequences of violent conflict to promote international peace, security and development (USAID, 2012 p.16). This framework presents USAid's conflict-sensitivity to be applied in a two staged process: Conflict Diagnosis and Formulation of Response Recommendations. Diagnosis stage means to analyze political, economic, social, and security factors at work whereas response formulation state is about to conduct analysis of existing programming to assess gaps and opportunities with respect to the conflict dynamics. USAid's CAF suggests to conduct conflict assessment for large-scale violent conflict and war (Ibid, p.9) that ignores their conflict sensitivity lens to small scale or latent conflict situations.

3.2.3 SDC (Swiss Development Agency)

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has developed a 'Conflict Sensitive Program/Project Management - CSPM' set which exhibits characteristics of management approach that addresses values, procedures, tools and communications for steering development and humanitarian programmes and their projects in a context of political tensions, prior, during or after the violent conflict (SDC, 2006). This approach largely combines the theoretical and methodological approaches of Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment- PCIA and Do-No-Harm (Ibid 2006).

SDC's Fragility, Conflict and Human Rights (FCHR) unit has developed a comprehensive Conflict Sensitive Project Management (CSPM) tool box (FCHR, 2021) gathering contemporary concepts and methodologies. The tool box details application of CSPM in cooperation programs and project cycle management. It aims to be applied in different categories of the institutions such as i) security management ii) human resources iii) communication and policy dialogues; and iv) financial management (SDC, 2006). CSPM requires the analysis of contexts (fragility, actors, and conflict & violence) to decide the magnitude of conflict-sensitivity application in their programming.

3.2.4 GiZ (formerly GTZ): German agency for International Cooperation

GIZ has published a guidebook entitled 'Sustainable Economic Development in Conflict-Affected Environment' authored by Grossmann et.al. (2009) which has developed and described German approach to Conflict-Sensitivity. According to the guidebook, GIZ's crisis early warning system and conflict marker are the building blocks to inform them conflict-sensitive planning and programming of development cooperation in conflict-affected countries. This guidebook considers 'do-no-harm' as a minimum standard for all sectoral interventions operating in the regions of conflict. Their ultimate value rests on avoiding creation or aggravation of violent conflicts among and between the social groups (GIZ, 2019). Presenting 'Peace and Conflict Assessment - PCA' as their overarching methodological framework for handling the issues of 'conflict' and 'peace', GIZ's guidebook describes PCA is based on 4-elements: Peace and Conflict Analysis or Peacebuilding Needs Assessment, Peacebuilding Relevance Assessment, Riks Management and Peace and Conflict Related Impact Monitoring (Grossmann, Bagwitz, Elges, Kruk, & Lange, 2009). GIZ also gives equal emphasis on gender dimensions to make their projects more conflict sensitive.

For conflict-sensitive project implementation, GIZ also begins from conflict-analysis based on a practical guidebook (Leonhardt, 2001) which focuses identifying political factors and dynamics. The conflict analysis guidebook consists of 4-steps of conflict analysis such as: conflict profile, stakeholder analysis, conflict analysis and trends & opportunities; and 5-steps of planning in conflict situations such as: capacity analysis, objective analysis, strategy development, risk appraisal and conflict indicators (Ibid 2001).

3.2.5 European Union - EU

EU's staff guidebook presents conflict sensitivity guidance (European Commission, 2015) focusing Conflict Early Warning System, Political Framework for Crisis Approach, Gender Impact Assessment, Environmental and Climate Assessments, Fragility Assessment, Post-Conflict Needs Assessment together with the Conflict Analysis tool. In fragile and conflict situations, EU has different sectoral interventions such as: i) democracy, human rights, rule of law and security sector reform; ii) gender equality and empowerment of women; iii) Governance, public sector management, local authorities, civil society and accountability; iv) Climate change, natural resources, sustainable agriculture and energy; v) Supporting security-development links, stabilization and peacebuilding; vi) Social protection, health, education and jobs; vii) Business environment, regional integration, world markets and infrastructure; viii) Diplomatic measures: political dialogue, public diplomacy, sanctions, mediation and diplomatic demarches (Pugliese, 2023; European Commission, n.d.), hence application of conflict sensitivity is valued as means of successful implementation of these sectoral programs. Indeed, the EU's staff guidance also presents conflict sensitivity modules for funding modalities and aid delivery mechanisms, and also for humanitarian support. EU's CS process involves three stages: (i) Plan the Analysis (ii) Conduct the Analysis and (iii) Use the analysis to shape EU's support.

3.2.6 Japanese International Cooperation Agency - JICA

JICA's 'peacebuilding guideline' (JICA, 2001) provides conflict-sensitive approaches for implementation of peacebuilding activities which keeps 'peace' at the center of conflict-sensitive project implementation. Active engagement in conflict prevention, emergency relief, and post-conflict reconstruction/development assistance seems to be JICA's priority of peacebuilding initiatives (Ibid.). This requires staffers have adequate capacity to apply peacebuilding approaches across all interventions JICA aims to give due consideration to poverty, gender, environmental, and other global issues when providing peacebuilding assistance and study on a continuing basic measure for expanding and improving assistance in new areas of peacebuilding such as security sector reform, small arms control, child soldier measures, peace education, etc. (JICA, 2022).

3.2.7 Government of India

Indian aid to Nepal constitutes a big proportion, however it is not the ODA provider. Choudhury & Nagda (2019) writes Indian foreign aid sector is being influenced by new tradition of south-south partnership. It's aid to Nepal and other neighbors has been a continuation of maintain geopolitical clout and to keep crucial economic partnerships up and running. India does not differentiate between conflict-affected, post-conflict, and stable developing countries because of its own development experience as a country that has continued to face internal conflict in parts of the state since its independence seventy years ago (Paczynska, 2017). The authors further assert Indian aid does not possess high aid delivery costs that provides comparative advantage in assisting reconstruction and development in conflict-affected countries and Indian government also prides itself on having "demand-driven" development assistance without explicit conditionalities - aid that is requested by the recipients rather than determined by the donors and has no specific "conditions" that need to be met by the recipient government before disbursement.

3.3 Conflict sensitivity policy commitments of multilateral international organizations

3.3.1 United Nations (UN) Organizations

Because of several specialized agencies, funds and programs, entities and bodies and other related organizations under the UN-System having separate governing system, it is bit complex to describe them under one umbrella. Indeed, most of UN organizations have separately proliferated their own policies for conflict-sensitivity purpose. It is also noticed that UN organizations have formed a 'United Nations Sustainable Development Group' - UNSDG (previously UNDG) which guides, supports, tracks and oversees the coordination of development operations in the countries and territories where UN organizations are present (UNSDG, 2023).

Conducting a Conflict and Development Analysis - CDA guideline prepared and published by UNSDG (UNDG, 2016) provides an overview of UN organizations' conflict-sensitivity principles as well as conflict analysis process and its application in programming to demonstrate their approaches of conflict sensitivity. UNSDG's conflict and development analysis orients for 'peace' agendas as per the core objective of establishment of the United Nations. In the UN system, conflict analysis process contributes to ensure management of grievances and differences not becoming violent and destructive conflict is prevented before they escalate by drawing the attention of leaders and those planning country engagements. Even where conflict has already become violent, conflict analysis can contribute to deepening understanding of how to de-escalate violence and manage its consequences, while simultaneously addressing its causes. Their attention is also explicit over the several conflict issues and consequences that are not always taken into account such as Gender-Based Violence (GBV), issues of environmental degradation, the weak management of natural resources etc. UNDG guide uses the terms 'conflict drivers' and 'peace engine' that give similar ideas of 'connectors and dividers' used by Do-No-Harm approach (Anderson, 2000).

Apart from UNDG's guidance, UNICEF's approach is more focused on child sector and in conjugating it with peace-building. In their guidebook, UNICEF asserts 'doing no harm' as their minimum requirement of integrating conflict sensitivity in programming and they wish to 'do more good' while working in conflict (UNICEF, 2016). Meanings of 'internal sensitivity' and external sensitivity' are the additional insights in UNICEF's guidebook. This explains internal sensitivity should be articulated by behavior of their personnel; during procurement, HR process and financial activities; within communication process, internal culture and crises management. Similarly, externally sensitive issues are: equity and inclusion; partnerships, projects and programs; external perceptions; process of engagement with government and non-state actors; including gender issues (Ibid 2016)

Through the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2018-2022 the United Nations Country Team - UNCT in Nepal express their commitment stating they have undertaken a risk informed programming approach in the analysis and prioritization of programming during the development of the framework and they will work in compliance with the 'do-no-harm' and conflict sensitivity principles not only through the UNDAF but in all programming undertaken by the UN (United Nations Country Team Nepal, 2017). Similarly, WFP has endorsed a policy called "WFP's role in peacebuilding in transition setting" that paves way to make their interventions more conflict-sensitive (WFP, 2013). UNOPS has also published a conflict-sensitivity guidance for their staffers (UNOPS, 2021). In common, the UN's policies seemingly aim to enhance the capacity of their staff to apply conflict sensitivity and include peacebuilding approaches in the analysis, policies, programmes, activities and evaluations carried out across the system, to 'do no harm' and to contribute to building and sustaining peace.

3.3.2 The World Bank

The World Bank's conflict analysis framework (CAF) consists of four major components: Risk Screening Process, Conflict Analysis, Methodology and Analytical aspects (World Bank, 2005). Prior to using the CAF, the Bank's Risk Screening process maps out the violent conflict in the past ten years and prevalence of low per capita gross-national income. Higher the incidence of risk screening indicators, it necessitates higher need of conflict

analysis (Ibid, 2005). Once the need of conflict analysis is confirmed it considers six elements for analysis such as social and ethnic relations, governance and political institutions, human rights and security, economic structures and performance, environmental and natural resources, and external factors. The World Bank conducts conflict sensitivity analysis of their key lending operations using the information of risks derived from the conflict analysis and assessments carried out by using the conflict analysis framework. World Bank seems open to use relevant tools and approaches developed by other organizations. For example, in a recently processed evaluation of conflict sensitivity in their individual projects (IEC, 2020) the bank has drawn the tools from DFID's Strategic Conflict Assessment tool, GIZ's Peace and Conflict Assessment tool, and USAID's Conflict Assessment Framework tool.

3.3.3 Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Asian Development Bank had piloted a conflict-sensitivity approach during the post-conflict context of Nepal after which they published a report called "A Peacebuilding Tool for a Conflict-Sensitive Approach to Development: A pilot initiative in Nepal" (ADB, 2012a). In this report ADB uses the term 'Peace-building Tool - PBT' to denote their conflict sensitive approach. They also label this tool as a 'Peace-Sensitive Approach'. Similarly, based on their 1977-2012 experiences in other countries those they consider as fragile and conflict-affected states ADB produced another hand-book called a staff hand-book "Working Differently in Fragile and Conflict Affected Situations: The ADB Experience" (ADB, 2012b). ADB's Peacebuilding tool appears as a means to understanding the local context, and identifying and addressing potential risks to development assistance. It is also sounds like an analytical tool for assisting project teams in understanding the local context, and identifying potential risks to the implementation of development projects that are linked to social conflict as well as in formulating mitigation measures for addressing these risks. It is designed to identify opportunities for building peace and social cohesion within the context of preparing development projects.

ADB considers flexibility, sustainability and partnership are their guiding principles for working in conflict affected situations (ADB, 2012b) which means it requires conflict sensitive approaches to uphold their principles.

3.4 Conflict sensitivity policy commitments of International CSOs/NGOs

Based on reviewed policy commitments, the International non-governmental organizations found in Gorkha can be classified in below 5-categories:

- (i) **Organizations having own strategies, approaches, tools and guidelines:** for example, CARE's UK office has developed a 'Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit', and CARE Nepal office had developed a 'Conflict Sensitivity and Peace-building Strategy 2008-2012'. CRS have defined their minimum standard of conflict sensitivity and developed a training module for their staffs. Mercy Corps, World Vision etc. also have defined their minimum standards of conflict sensitivity. Helvetas, a Swiss NGO has developed a comprehensive manual for working in fragile and conflict-affected situations.
- (ii) **Organizations having joint guidelines developed in association with other organizations:** for example - the conflict sensitivity consortium which was represented by 35 international NGOs had developed a guidebook entitled 'How to Guide Conflict Sensitivity'. Agencies such as CARE-Nepal, Save the Children, and World Vision are some organizations seen in the study area who were also present in the consortium.
- (iii) **Organizations having some comparable guidebooks that are developed individually or jointly with other organizations:** for example - START Network, which is a consortium of more than 50 organizations working in humanitarian sector have developed an "Integrated Conflict Prevention and Resilience Handbook" which embeds conflict-sensitivity components. Among all, the INGOs present in study area - CARE-Nepal, Christian Aid, CRS, Save the Children, Oxfam GB, People in Need (PIN), World Vision, Handicap International (Humanity & Inclusion), Mercy Corps are the members of START Network. This handbook was prepared in UKAid's funding. LWF and World Vision had partnered to publish 'Faith Sensitive Approach in Humanitarian Response'. Though this approach does not begin from conflict analysis, these organizations believe this approach helps to engage in conflict sensitive manner (LWF & IRW, 2018).
- (iv) **Organizations having accounted the approaches prescribed by their donor organizations or affiliated bodies:** for example, in addition to own manual about working in FCAS, Helvetas equally refers to the 'Conflict Sensitive Project Management - CSPM' handbook developed by the SDC. SNV has not made any document public related to their CS policies and approaches, however, they have created some job positions responsible to ensure their agency's work be conflict sensitive.
- (v) **Organizations not having conflict sensitive approaches explicitly in their policy documents, or no partnership with other agencies for conflict sensitivity mainstreaming:** for example, Hellen Keller International, Raleigh International, Samaritan Purse, Mountain Child, Good Neighbors International, LWR are some examples who have no reference how they operate in conflict sensitive manner.

3.5 Conflict sensitivity policy commitments of international private sector aid organizations

In Nepal's aid sector, emergence of international private sector is a new trend and their role is also increasing. Organizations mapping in the study area identified Mott MacDonald Ltd. (MM) and Adam Smith International (ASI) as the private sector international organizations' working in aid sector. Possible presence of other private sector organizations cannot be denied in absence of clear information.

ASI lacks published documents on their CS approaches and tools. They have implemented some aid projects in Gorkha district without involving local organizations which seems different approach compared to other international organizations. As evident in one of the reports, a simple model can be seen on how they tend to work in conflict-affected situations (ASI, 2014, p.22). It asserts - they ensure that they understand the politics, they constantly monitor the wider context, they consider risks and manage them tightly, they plan for change and invest in flexibility, and they treat local ownership as an objective in its own right. These attributions are largely resembling to the conflict sensitivity principles. Another private sector organization, Mott MacDonald Limited (MML) also does not have any public document that can be referred as an explicit example of their conflict sensitive approach or commitment. During an interview, one of district-based staff of MML said they were provided training on Safe and Effective Development Approaches by the DFID's Risk Management Office, and they adhere the approaches of their donors while working in field. In a telephone interview, MML's team leader based in the country office also cleared that they do not have any defined approaches on conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity, however their programs in Nepal are built on international experiences of the organizations in conflict affected countries, and they adhere to the compliance requirements of their donors.

4 Discussion

Among the bilateral aid organizations, UK Government organizations retain the most robust conflict analysis system in place. Different department and offices involved in foreign affairs use several conflict analysis tools developed by themselves. Beyond that, they also use additional resources developed by non-governmental organizations who have received the UK government's fund resources. In Nepal's context, UKAid/DFID and GiZ have jointly developed a Risk Management and Safe and Effective Development Tool (RM-SED) which they aim to use for conflict and context analysis, threat and vulnerability analysis, stakeholders mapping and enhanced image and acceptance in the operational context (RMO, 2011). GiZ's separate Conflict Sensitivity and Risk Management Strategy seems to guide project staffs in recognizing, analyzing and sensitively responding to the interface between the development interventions and the conflict (GTZ-FSRP, 2008).

GiZ's strategy more focuses on potential risks of conflict upon safety and security of project staffs, beneficiaries, project resources and also on the achievements made by the projects by maintaining neutrality in operational areas (Leonhardt, 2001). It also emphasizes delivering services 'without doing harm' to maintain a positive reputation and image of the organization and its work (GTZ-FSRP, 2008). One important insight that can be drawn from GiZ's guidebook is - conflict sensitivity is not an additional independent management task, rather it requires that project staff adapt their perspective to account for peace-building issues within their regular project management responsibilities. GiZ's conflict-sensitivity is guided by Do-No-Harm, Safety priority, Flexibility, Selection of right partners, paying special attention to personal issues; and Cooperate, coordinate and communicate with all relevant stakeholders. GiZ's conflict-sensitivity approaches are equally strong but they are much focused on risk mitigation from safety and security perspectives.

USAid's Conflict Assessment Framework recognizes the core principle of conflict sensitivity and states all development activities should be conflict-sensitive. It seems more focused to manage or mitigate the ongoing conflict rather than minimize the negative impacts or potential conflicts caused by aid delivery. The term 'conflict response' what USAid's documents refer to denote both for 'conflict sensitive programming' and 'peacebuilding programming' limits USAid's understanding about conflict sensitivity. Also, the diagnostic questions embedded in their conflict analysis framework seem to be more relevant for macro-level assessments rather in the micro-level contexts where projects are actually situated. Therefore, this framework can help to partially cover the conflict analysis of a society. Though the Capable Partners Program funded by USAid could be a great resource for them towards Conflict Sensitive Monitoring and Evaluation (Kingham & Levinger, 2021), the conflict analysis framework and the complementing application resources fail to incorporate complete conflict-sensitivity package in their guidelines.

SDC's conflict sensitive project management approach considers 'Do-No-Harm' as the minimum requirement of the CSPM. Earlier, prevention of violence remained as the key approach of SDC's conflict-sensitivity programming, but in later stage adjustments of the project/program to the conflict context, and gender dimensions have embedded in their policies making it much robust and conflict sensitive stating that that (i) consequences of interventions are the product of actions of SDC and behavior of their representatives (staffs) in the operating contexts (KOFF, n.d.) and (ii) enabling both women and men to meet their needs, as well as supporting recog-

dition between men and women for each-others' needs and rights (Barandun, 2006).

EU's conflict-sensitivity policies recognize that all aid interventions inject new resources into a context, potentially creating losers as well as winners. Beginning from 'Conflict Analysis' and drawing result of conflict prevention and peace-building appears to the core of EU's commitments (European Commission, 2015). EU tends to use conflict sensitive approaches to make its engagement more effective in fragile and conflict affected states, more cost-effective, strengthen development good practices, and manage the security risks. Indeed, EU's understanding about conflict-sensitivity means to prevent countries from slipping into fragility and conflict in the first place than applying only in the contexts that are overtly affected by conflict and fragility. It implies that EU does not consider conflict sensitivity as an appropriate approach for all contexts which limits EU's understanding about the core theme. However, as long as EU's support are based on regional and country strategies, budgetary provision on sectoral priorities and public diplomacy, it helps them make conflict sensitive in practice.

India and Japan are the further two prominent bilateral donor countries with reference to the study site but their conflict sensitivity commitments are not much overt as per the public documents. Japanese policy publications on conflict-sensitivity subject are very rare. Only available document in their website JICA's 2001 'peacebuilding guideline' suggests little about their CS standpoint. However, a review report published by OECD mentions - Japan has become more conflict sensitive (OECD, 2020) in recent years. Further literatures suggest that Japan has given ample attention to conflict, its analysis and support for conflict prevention, peace-building and addressing the root causes of conflict (JICA, 2019; Chapman et.al., 2009; JICA, 2011). But these documents have not fluently express how they apply CS approaches in their programming. In Nepal, Japan has joined hands with international communities to express their conflict sensitive commitment through different mechanisms, e.g. being a signatory of Basic Operating Guidelines - BOGs of international organizations working in Nepal alike other bilateral donors in Nepal.

Unparallel to the bilateral donors discussed above, Indian foreign assistance does not appear much worried on the effects of conflict on their funding though it provides support in the conflict affected countries. India has not published any policy commitments to conflict sensitivity and has not signed the Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs) agreed and signed by most of other donor agencies in Nepal.

Multilateral organizations conflict-sensitivity policy descriptions also concur with the bilateral organizations commitment to varied degrees. United Nations Development Group (UNDG)'s guideline uses the terms 'conflict drivers' and 'peace engine' in its policy papers to apply conflict sensitivity. These terms give similar meaning to the terms connectors or dividers used in Do-No-Harm approach (Anderson, 2000) or peace impact or conflict impact used in PCIA approach (Bush, 1998). Separate UN entities possess separate policy commitments available to public sphere, whereas they are found equally abided by donors' policies since they rely on funding of donor countries in many instances. In contrary the World Bank is using a qualitatively and quantitatively structured and robust conflict analysis framework. The Bank uses its own framework for conflict analysis but it retains very limited resources related to conflict sensitivity application and analysis. Despite the fact that World Bank's commitment towards conflict sensitivity is explicitly expressed in the project reports (WBG, 2019). Clear and ample information for staffs about the need of adopting different approaches at different situations is the specialty of the World Bank's guide-book.

Despite clarity about the principles of conflict sensitivity; essence and process of conflict/situation analysis; and understanding about the context and intervention, ADB's resources are little behind to define what are the conflict sensitive approaches for them and how they practice such approaches at different stages of a project cycle. In Nepal's case ADB had attempted institutionalizing 'Peace-building tool for conflict sensitivity' by embedding it as a short-course in the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) for capacity building of the government staffs (ADB, 2014), which is a positive example undertaken by international aid agencies in Nepal.

Who has influenced/contributed to Donors' policies and approaches

In addition to the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, DFID is evident to provide funding to other several projects in parallel to build knowledge on Conflict Sensitivity. They provided support to GSDRC and and CDA Collaborative Learning Project as well. All these institutions worked separately to contribute the donors approach make further robust. Similarly, other donors such as . USAid had provided funding to CDA, Capable partners program (in Academy for Educational Development - AED, and Management System International - MSI) etc., SDC had provided funding to Swisspeace, Swiss Solidarity etc., GiZ (formerly GTZ) had supported Berghof Foundation, APFO et.a. for Conflict Sensitivity Resource Pack; EU had provided funding to Saferworld, and other European institutions; World Bank and ADB to International Alert etc. This has largely influenced the donors policies. They seen to adopting the recommendations made by respective institutions and/or individuals whom funding was provided to work on CS approaches, tools and guidelines.

Figure 1: A view of donors connection with practicing organization (Source: Developed by Author, 2024)

As described earlier, international non-governmental organizations have developed their conflict sensitivity policies either separately or in partnership with other organizations. These organizations think that resource transfer from higher to lower domain, implicit ethical messages and communication and information gathering/sharing mechanisms can create tensions or peace among the beneficiary communities. Review of their documents (Helvetas, 2015; Oxfam, 2016; Care, n.d.; Care Nepal, 2008; Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, 2012a; CRS, 2015; START Network, 2018; APFO et.al. 2004) provides features in their commitments as described below:

- (1) **Guiding principles of conflict sensitive approach:** Responsibility, Participation, Inclusiveness, Impartiality, Transparency, Accountability, Respect; Partnership, Coordination and Complementarity, and Timeliness
- (2) **Components of conflict sensitive approach:** Conduct a conflict analysis and update it regularly), link the analysis with the programming cycle of the intervention and Design, implement, monitor and evaluate the project/programme in a conflict sensitive way.
- (3) **Minimum requirement of conflict sensitivity:** 'Good-enough' Conflict Analysis, and Do-No-Harm
- (4) **Anticipation from application of CS approaches:** Managed potential conflict risks to staffs, programs and beneficiaries; and reputational risks to organization, and Conflict not exacerbated, rather minimized
- (5) **Common tools in use to mainstream conflict sensitive approach:** Conflict Analysis tools (different types), Actors, Stakeholder Mapping/Analysis Tool, Risk Mapping/Analysis Tools, Risk Matrix; Dividers and Connector (Sources of Tensions and peace) Analysis, Scenario building tools
- (6) **Conflict Sensitivity assurance instruments:** Project/Program Log-frame, Project Proposals, Project Contracts, Project Reports, Monitoring and Evaluation Reports, Staff Capacity Building
- (7) **Mechanisms that help CS approaches alive:** Staff Policy, Basic Operating Guidelines, Security Guidelines, Partnership Policy, Code of Conduct
- (8) **Required competencies among the staffs:** a. Knowledge sets - Understanding of Conflict, Understanding of Conflict Sensitivity; b. Skill Sets- able to have conversations with individual/groups about conflict, able to analyze conflict, able to find links between programming and conflict, able to convince others of the need of conflict sensitivity; c. Attitude: accepting that programming or the overall organization's action can inadvertently contribute to conflict, self-awareness of own biases and how individual actions may be perceived in different contexts, processing good intercultural sensitivity and understanding, able to challenge assumptions and look for various ways to gather and analyze information

While international private sector organizations involved in aid delivery do not possess explicit conflict sensitivity policies, it has also been difficult to track legal statuses of some international organizations operated in the study areas. Unless they have proper registration and affiliation with legitimate government authorities, they can pose negative impacts on the local contexts, which is conflict insensitive. In a new trend, large number of private sector organizations are also found participating in aid-delivery in the country. Such organizations are neither having agreement with SWC or reporting to Ministry of Finance. Field enquiries revealed that such organizations have fulfilled the legal compliances by registering in GoN/Office of the Company Registrar (OCR) either as foreign company or local company as a venture of international one. Such companies registered with OCR are gradually occupying the space of INGOs but OCR does not have strict and established mechanisms to regulate, monitor and evaluate the companies. DAI, Tetra-tech, Mott MacDonald, RTI International, Winrock International, Pact International, Swisscontact, Hellen Keller International etc. are examples of such organizations frequently heard in development field. Their public documents do not describe enough how they fulfil legal and other compliances in Nepal.

Haider (2014b) asserts investments and interventions of private sector organizations also are not free from interacting with the conflict environment, and therefore, they should be accompanied with conflict sensitive practices. He describes private sector organizations should be abided by accountability, respect, fairness, transparency and inclusiveness principles of conflict sensitivity and to get benefits of better risk management, lower operational costs; reputation, credibility and social good-will, and positive and constructive stakeholder engagements. Indeed, compliance to national rules, regulations and national/international standard is important while implementing infrastructure projects. Absence of published documents for public or researcher's information intricately hinders their transparency and gauge their sensitivity towards conflict-susceptive environment.

5 Conclusion

Among the bilateral donors, the UK Government appears more conflict-sensitive in terms of policy commitment also investing on research, practice and structuring the conflict sensitivity as humanitarian, development and peacebuilding agenda.

SDC and GIZ among the bilateral and ADB a multi-national bank are also affording strong policy commitments. SDC by creating a 'Conflict Sensitive Project Management Framework' piloted in Nepal, ADB by developing a 'Peace-Sensitive Tools' also piloted in Nepal and GIZ by partnering with DFID to create Risk Management Office and financing for Safe and Effective Development (SED) tools have garnered Nepal specific commitments in their policies. On another side, the World Bank, EU and USAid's conflict-sensitivity policies are less visible to public domain. However, World Bank's risk screening and conflict analysis process let them govern the interventions in conflict sensitive way.

EU's early warning system and conflict marker help them to forecast about the conflict escalation and consequently fit their interventions on the conflict dynamics. US Aid's Conflict Assessment Framework foregrounds the conflict sensitive actions but it lacks guidance to their staffs and partners on how to deal with the conflict sensitive issues and adhere with CS principles at the ground. JICA do not have explicit document those describe their 'CS' strategies or processes. However, its peacebuilding guidelines treat conflict-sensitivity as equivalent to peacebuilding.

Similarly, not all international humanitarian organizations can be placed and discussed in a single basket. Some of them possess strong commitments to conflict sensitivity and have developed own approaches and tools. Some others refer to their donors' approaches or peers' approaches to apply in their project interventions. The rest of them do not have any explicit commitments to this agenda.

International private sector organizations that were evident in the study field do not possess any of policy commitments to conflict sensitivity. It can be thus concluded that international aid organizations have not given equal priority to conflict sensitivity. DAC countries and multilateral international organizations who have geo-political interest across the globe have established this agenda as a customary practice; whereas other aid providers, comparatively less influential international NGOs and aid-project implementers, and the international private sector do not have tangible interest on conflict-sensitivity. Since conflict-sensitivity practice has utmost importance for effective delivery of aid services, host governments need to monitor donors' and aid-related actors' commitment to this agenda particularly in conflict-affected or latent conflict contexts.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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