

5 Choosing the Methods and Tools

“When considering your methodological choices and tools, remember that conflict analysis is not an end in itself.”



Introduction

In many cases, gathering information is not the problem; the main challenge is making sense or giving meaning to the information collected. When engaging in conflict analysis to inform preventive action or peacebuilding work, analysis is a vital component of the process. Data analysis contributes to the credibility of the information and also shapes the response mechanisms expected.

This section will present approaches and tools for working with information you have gathered using the previous sections of this guide. We will address preliminary ways to sort through information, and present an overview of tools or ‘lenses’ for analysing the information to produce a conflict analysis. Important considerations at this stage are how to choose among analytical tools, ways to validate an analysis, and uses of conflict analyses.

5.1 Preliminary sorting processes

If you have performed any or all of the steps for gathering information described in the previous sections of this guide, you will have a large amount of information, in addition to your own knowledge that you bring to the analysis process. The next challenge is to sort through the information to make sense of it. There are several **ways to sort information:**

- By actors, issues, causes/origins of conflict, and dynamics among any of the categories.
- By major sectorial categories, for example: political, social, economic, security, justice.
- By groupings of related issues or topics.
- By different levels of analysis: local communities, province/state/sub-national region, national, regional, international.

In order to sort by any of these categories, one possible first step is to put single pieces of information or *headlines* on cards or pieces of paper that can be moved around. Try sorting a couple of different ways, and see which categories are most appropriate for your situation.

5.2 Overview of analytical tools

In this guide we present eight different tools for analysing conflicts—and there are many other tools and larger frameworks available. **How do you choose among them**, as in most situations, you cannot afford to apply them all? First, return to the discussion in Section 2 regarding the purpose for the analysis. Then look at the array of tools presented in this section, Overview of Analytical Tools, which provides a brief summary of each approach. Each tool addresses a different way of looking at the conflict. Some of the tools and frameworks provided simply analyse the information. Others help make the bridge from analysis to programme choice and design. The tools can be used in sequence or combination, depending on the core purpose of the process. There are many other tools for conflict analysis.

Actor-Oriented Analysis

- **Stakeholder Analysis: Positions, Interests, Issues and Power**

This tool examines each important group or individual in the conflict, identifying their stated positions, interests, needs, issues and sources



The bibliography provides an additional annotated list of helpful resources.

of power. This is a way to understand the role that each party plays in the conflict. It is especially important to do this kind of exercise before working directly with any of the groups involved.

- **Mapping Relationships Among Actors**

This tool is a way to show the relationships among the different groups and individuals involved in a graphic way. It helps to understand all of the different actors and how they interact with each other.

Issue-Related and Causal Analysis

- **The Conflict Tree**

This exercise is a very simple way to explore the causes and effects of key conflict factors. The roots represent the underlying causes, while the branches represent the effects or results of the conflict. It is a good way to start thinking about conflict systems.

- **Dividers & Connectors Analysis**

This is a method for understanding the conflict context, by identifying factors that bring people together (connectors) and factors that push people apart (dividers). This is one tool for examining conflict sensitivity and can be used for ensuring that humanitarian and development programming is sensitive to conflict factors.

- **Threat Analysis: Immediate to Long-Term Threats/Vulnerabilities**

This process helps us to sort through the various conflict factors to identify which ones represent urgent threats of violence, and which ones might eventually lead to violence, but not soon.

- **Levels of Potential Change**

This process examines the different levels and layers of conflict: deeper structural and cultural factors, formal and informal institutions; social norms; inter-group relations; personal attitudes, behaviour, perceptions, prejudice.

Integrative Tools

- **Scenario Development**

Scenario development suggests two or three possible stories about the future of the conflict area, as a tool for discussing ways to influence which of the potential futures comes true, based on interactions among actors and issues.

- **Systems Mapping of Conflict**

This process treats conflict as a system of causes and effects, often resulting in vicious circles. It helps to uncover the dynamics and interactions among conflict factors and actors, and produces a conflict map that can be used in strategy development and programme planning.

BOX 12: DECIDING FOR A CONFLICT ANALYSIS METHOD OR TOOL

When considering your methodological choices and tools, remember that conflict analysis is not an end in itself. It is only worth the time and effort if it is used:

- In making choices about what to do, where, with whom and why.
- In designing programmes or projects, through setting goals, intermediate objectives, activities—and indicating the expected changes from the activities, immediate outcomes and longer-term impacts.
- In determining whether and how to work with the various parties to a conflict.

5.3 Processes for validation and refinement of the analysis

Before we look at the conflict analysis tools in more detail, we should discuss an important topic: **how to make sure that your analysis is correct**. Even if you have a balanced analysis team and have done a good job collecting information from many perspectives, inevitably the resulting analysis will not be entirely accurate or may include some biases. There is no need to blame anyone for this; it is natural that some people will emphasise some things and not others. What is important to one person may not be important to another. In fact, **the interpretation of the conflict and its causes may be a major part of the tensions and disagreements among groups**. Luckily, you can include contrasting views and perspectives in your analysis.

If you are going to use the conflict analysis as the basis for making choices about the general direction of programming, for detailed programme/project planning, or to design an intervention process with the parties in conflict, you need to be sure that your analysis is correct—within reason. No map, narrative, or list of important factors is the same as reality—nor should it be. But some maps are more accurate than others. You need to make sure that the analysis is **good enough** for your purposes.

Also, analysis should not be a one-off activity, but should be **continued** throughout a programme or any other initiative. You must keep updating and refining the analysis, which will provide more opportunities for increasing the accuracy. Meanwhile, if you have produced an initial analysis, using any of the tools presented in this guide, you should find some way to check whether it is accurate. There are various ways to do this, suggested in Box 13.

Basic Principle: Regardless of the method of validation chosen, it is extremely important that you and other members of your organisation (or the analysis team) remain open, respectful and non-defensive in relation to feedback offered. **Do not attempt to defend the analysis!** Find ways to accommodate different perspectives.

BOX 13: SOME WAYS OF OBTAINING VALIDATION:

1. Hold a short workshop in which the participants represent all of the important perspectives—if the levels of tension and political situation allow. Present the analysis and ask for feedback, suggestions, corrections, additions, etc.
2. Hold separate meetings with small groups of people representing different viewpoints. Thus, you might hold one meeting with civil society and another with government, or one meeting with tribe A and another with tribe B, or with women, men, youth, elders, depending on the nature of the conflict and the parties involved. As in the option above, present the analysis and ask for feedback, suggestions, corrections, additions, etc. This approach may be particularly appropriate in highly polarised societies.
3. Meet with a series of individuals who represent different perspectives, presenting your analysis and asking for feedback.

Following any of these approaches, you should determine how to change your analysis (narrative, maps, diagrams, charts, tables) to take into account the feedback you have received. However, keep in mind that in most cases you are looking for a good *enough* analysis, not the perfect depiction of the situation. Ideally, you will also be refining and updating the analysis on a continual basis.

5.4 Presentation and tone

In most cases, the analysis will be a written document, unless the situation is so insecure that written text would pose a danger. Assuming that some form of written document will be produced, what should it be like? Is this an analysis for internal organisational use only, or for wider circulation? Here are some considerations to bear in mind:

- **Purpose.** The presentation of the analysis should take into account the audience/user group(s) and how the report will be used. For example, if it is for the purpose of early warning, the report content will include recommendations for early action to specific actors, and the form should strive towards something that can be read and acted upon in a timely manner. A conflict analysis is of most use if it is part of an ongoing exercise, so the way it is presented should be easy to review and update.
- **Descriptive, not judging.** A conflict analysis may have to accommodate sharply different perceptions about the situation, and must find a way to present those views as objectively as possible, without taking a stand or judging views that you may find difficult or that challenge your own values. “Naming and shaming” documents are not conducive to conflict resolution.
- **Plain language.** Text should be written in simple, plain language, avoiding jargon, obscure acronyms or academic terms or concepts.
- **Mix of graphics and text.** Different people gain understanding from visual presentations or from written descriptions and explanations. Usually a combination is helpful. Graphics need to be explained and key concepts should be depicted graphically, if possible.
- **Clear message.** Avoid information overload in your presentation, determine which key messages you should prioritise and structure your findings in such a way that the reader will come away with the key messages in mind.

BOX 14: STRUCTURING AN ARGUMENT IN CONFLICT ANALYSIS REPORTS

When converting our conflict analysis data into reports for a particular use, it can be helpful to learn from practices in media engagement, where a shortage of space and attention span mean that structure of an argument is key. Here are the basics of an Op-Ed (opinion piece), deconstructed into its main components.

1. **Main argument:** identify and highlight your main argument in the first or second paragraph of your report. >> Example: *If the US policy of “awakening councils” from Iraq will be mimicked in the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan—they will fail.*
2. **First supporting statement:** present facts/findings that back up your main argument. >> *First, the credibility of the council concept is dubious at best.*
3. **Second supporting statement:** present facts/findings that back up your main argument. >> *Second, tribal dynamics in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border regions are hardly conducive for councils.*
4. **Third supporting statement:** present facts/findings that back up your main argument. >> *Third, and most importantly, something more substantial and sustainable than short-term council-queuing is needed to quell the violence in the South Asian hinterlands.*
5. **Specific recommendation/solutions:** >> *New political and economic strategies, then, are needed to curb growing instability...*
6. **Strong ending:** if possible wrap up the beginning/main argument or theme introduced at the beginning. >> *Hopefully the only awakening that counsels Obama’s watch is the wisdom of wariness vis-à-vis America’s military modus operandi and a willingness to wage a softer form of US power.*

Source Michael Shank, Media Training Manual (GPPAC, 2009). Examples excerpted from Michael Shank and Shukria Dellawar, ‘Waking up to Afghanistan’s Realities,’ The Guardian, 3 December 2008.