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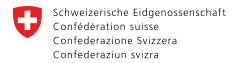
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC
Thematic Cooperation Division, Peace, Governance and Equality Section
Section Latin America and the Caribbean

CONFLICT SENSITIVE PROGRAM MANAGEMENT
EXPERIENCES FROM NICARAGUA

Experience in Nicaragua has shown that Conflict Sensitive Program Management (CSPM) allows to stay engaged and contributes to human rights and peacebuilding. Conflict is inherent in any process and may provide opportunities for positive change. As such, international cooperation is never conflict neutral. **Any responsible intervention thus requires conflict sensitivity**, aiming at minimizing the risk of negative effects (do no harm) and fostering the positive ones (peacebuilding). SDC applies CSPM with a **three-step-approach**: 1) Analyzing the conflict context 2) Identifying the interaction between the program and the conflict context 3) Adapting the program.

LESSONS LEARNT FROM NICARAGUA…

In Nicaragua, the relevance of CSPM became evident with **the socio-political crisis in 2018**. Social protests, violent repression, and polarization increased the risks for SDC and led to an accelerated implementation of CSPM, and adaptation of the country strategy. From working closely with the government, SDC shifted to working with multilateral and (inter-)national organizations directly. **The cooperation office closely accompanied partners and programs**. One of those programs was the Society, Culture, and Memory program (SCM), aiming at expanding the spaces of civil society from the perspectives of culture and memory.

…IN ANALYZING & SENSITIZING

Following the three-step approach, the emphasis was placed on **the analysis of the conflict context**, including the **actors**, as well as the conflict **factors** which either generate tension and violence (dividers) or allow people to build trust (connectors).

EXAMPLE: CONFLICT ANALYSIS FOR CULTURE AND ART INITIATIVES

For a partner organization of the SCM program engaging in popular theatre and dialogue among university students, the conflict analysis showed that the socio-political crisis required to adapt their project. Since students had been at the forefront of social protests in 2018, the government regarded universities as suspicious. To avoid exposing students, actors, and members of the organization, the project was adapted, and activities carried out in other cultural spaces. Thus, the awareness about conflict factors, actors, and dynamics allowed local partners to develop risk management strategies and to stay engaged.

…IN DEVELOPPING CAPACITIES & SKILLS

The capacity and skills development **involved a variety of actors**. They all brought specific expertise that contributed to enhancing capacities around CSPM tools and adapting them to the local realities. The capacity building was closely linked to ongoing processes, thereby fostering a **learning by doing approach**. With time, SDC and its partners could identify interactions between the context and the program, and **adapt their projects to mitigate risks and do no harm**.

EXAMPLE: LEARNING BY DOING

When civil society partners of the SCM program had to develop the project documents for the second phase, an international CSPM advisor held bilateral online sessions with each organization to apply CSPM analysis tools and discuss potential risks and mitigation measures in their specific project context. Instead of a separate workshop, partners thus learnt about how to integrate the three steps of CSPM while doing what they anyway had to do (developing ProDocs).

…IN IMPLEMENTING & INSTITUTIONALIZING

CSPM implementation benefited from a comprehensive process, supported by the SDC cooperation office. SDC regularly invited local partners to their offices to provide legal, administrative, and moral support given the new legal restrictions. This was a crucial factor to foster institutional resilience and confidence. Also, CSPM gained relevance when connected to other approaches such as gender and the psychosocial approach. This required recurrent **coordination** among actors, as well as **flexibility in terms of programs, processes, and resources.**

…IN MONITORING & LEARNING

A local organization fostering a culture of peace through community circus with children realized that the socio-political crisis also affected parents and divided the adults in the community along political positions. Therefore, they included group meetings for psychosocial support into their program, providing a safe space for adults to address the emotional and social effects and restore trust in the community. The organization thus connects CSPM and the PSA, which enhances the effectiveness of the intervention.

EXAMPLE: DATA COLLECTION, INDICATORS, AND STORIES OF CHANGE

The monitoring system of the SCM program includes a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators (i.e., emblematic cases of individuals, communities, organizations, or institutions that have changed attitudes, behaviour, processes, and/or policies). Thus, the program partners not only report on numbers, but document stories of change. As for example, a community where parents of opposed political sides engage in dialogue about their common interest in their children's wellbeing. Local partners have identified different options to document these stories (i.e., testimonies, survey to collect reflections).

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO ANALYZE AND SENSITIZE:

»   Use CSPM to increase institutional resilience and preparedness before the escalation of conflict.
»   Apply conflict analysis to identify actors, power relations, dividers/connectors, with gender and psychosocial lenses.
»   Openly discuss the scope and limitations of CSPM.

TO DEVELOP CAPACITIES AND SKILLS:

»   Plan a long-term engagement with adequate resources. Solid changes need capacity development processes.
»   Foster learning by doing by connecting capacity building on CSPM to the Program Cycle.
»   Promote safe and inclusive spaces for joint learning and trust building among local actors and SDC staff.
»   Develop skills based on the program partners' specific needs and connect to relevant expertise.

TO IMPLEMENT AND INSTITUTIONALIZE:

»   Ensure the management's support and provide resources to local partner to implement and institutionalize CSPM.
»   Ensure a close accompaniment by the cooperation office, promoting exchange among actors (donors, partners).
»   Ensure flexibility in terms of programs, processes, and resources.
»   Use CSPM in a complementary way with other approaches (gender, the psychosocial approach).

TO MONITOR CHANGE AND LEARN FROM:

»   Identify powerful stories and invest in measuring qualitative change.

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