

swisspeace

# Conflict Sensitivity

A conflict sensitive approach to  
research. An attempt.

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Schweizerische Friedensstiftung  
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# What is conflict sensitivity?

Conflict sensitivity refers to how we operate in a conflict context.

1. Understand the context in which you operate
2. Understand the interaction between your intervention and the context and
3. Act upon the understanding of this interaction in order to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts.

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# Guiding Principles

- Participation
- Transparency
- Respect for people's ownership of their conflict and suffering
- Accountability
- Partnership and coordination

# Rationale for conflict sensitivity

Research	Programme Implementation
We are part of the context: Do No Harm – being aware of the researchers' impact → adjust attitude	We are part of the context: Do No Harm and contribute to peacebuilding
Increase security of the researcher/respondents	Staying engaged
Continuation of research	
More accurate research results (?)	Achieving results
	Link different sectors of engagement

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# Different levels



Global Research Standards, ethical standards


National Standards, in CH: Standards set by SNF, KFPE 11 principles etc.

Standards, guidelines, rules and regulations, administrative procedures (local and international)

In US: Institutional Review Boards

Research project in it's research context: Research question, methodology, partners, research governance, operationalisation of research principles/guidelines etc.

The researcher in the research context: Attitudes, values, interaction with respondents, positionality, interpretation of data etc.

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# Conflict sensitivity: Step 1




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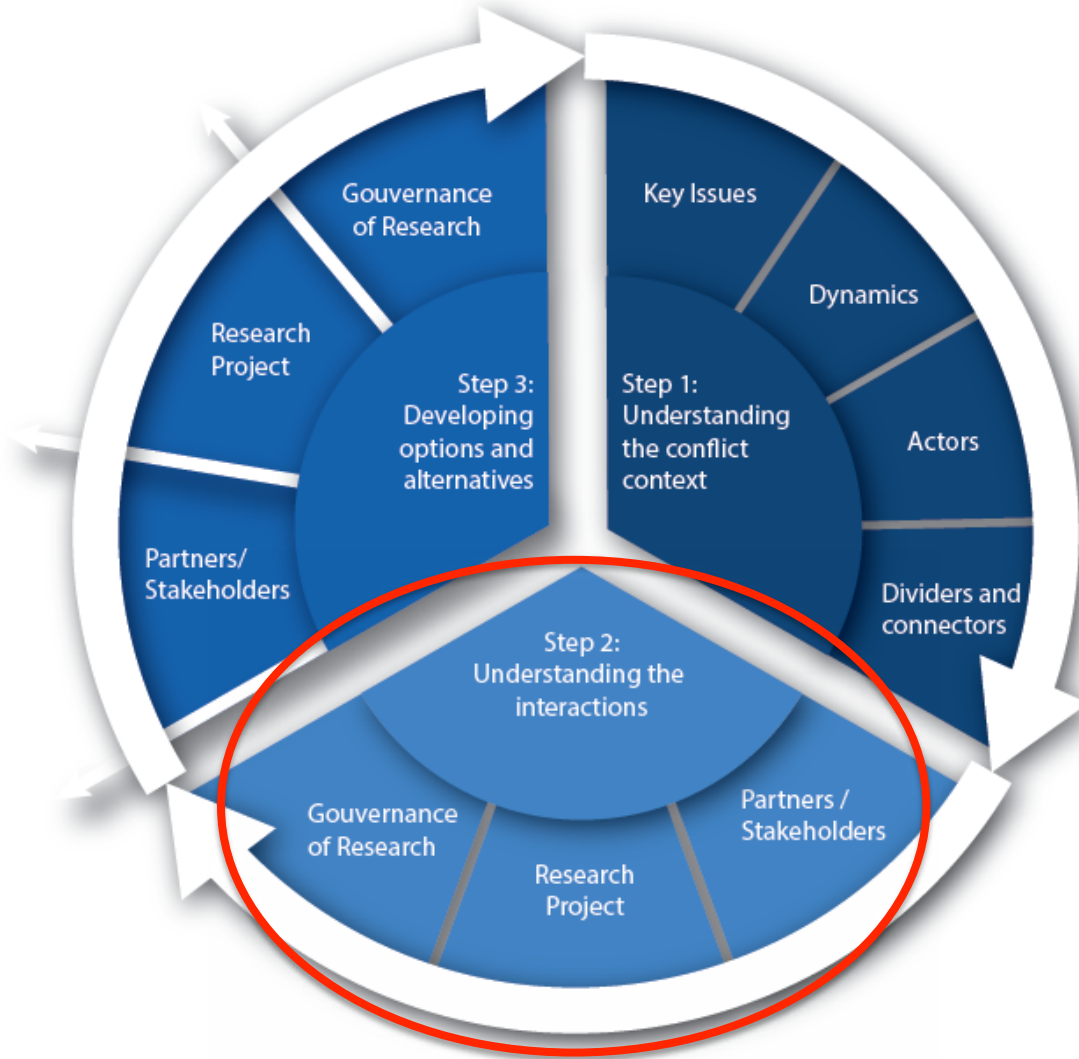
# Step 1: Conflict analysis questions

Minimal analysis of the conflict context:

- What are the conflict(s) - at which level (local, national, transborder, regional)? What's the relevant scope of analysis?
- Key issues of conflict: What are conflicts about?
- Dynamics: Can we see patterns of recurrence?
- Actors: What are the key actors of conflict (actors map that includes research project (!))
- What are elements in society that divide or connect people?

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# Conflict sensitivity: Step 2



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# Step 2: Interaction questions


Minimal analysis of interaction conflict context  research project:

Partners/stakeholders:

- Role/position of research partners and local authorities pertaining to the conflict? Selection criteria?
- How are local stakeholders involved in the design of the research agenda?

Research project:

- Research question: Is it linked to conflict issues? Is it politically relevant/sensitive in the context?
- Selection of respondents: Are they involved/affected by conflict? What is their role and position in conflict? Selection bias
- Geographic areas of research: Selection criteria? Is it a conflict affected?

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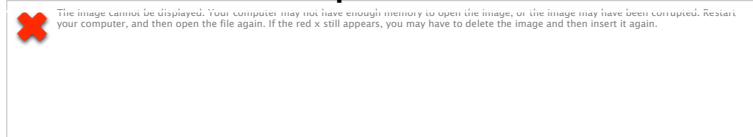
# Step 2: Interaction questions

## Research project:

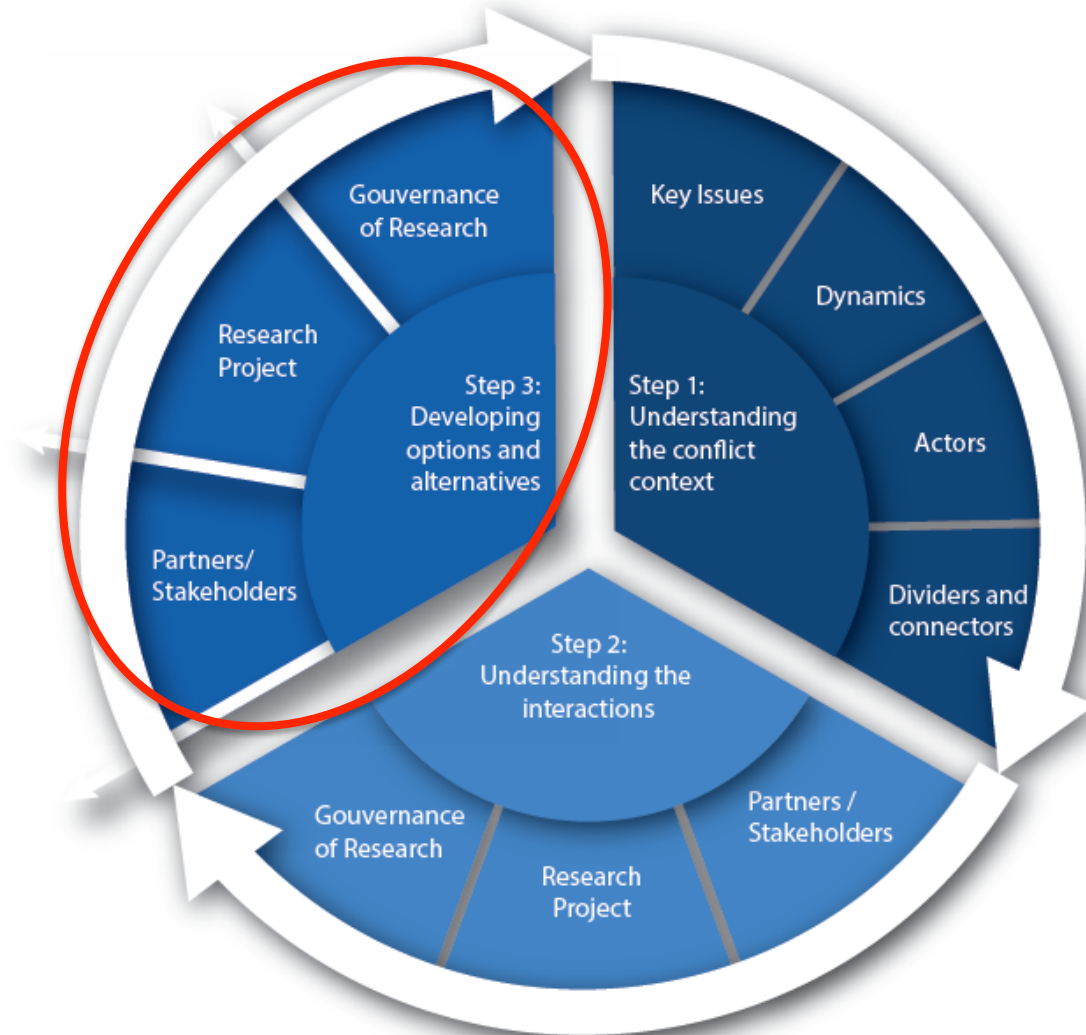
- Research methodology: Is the selected methodology culturally or politically sensitive in this particular context?

## Governance of research:

- Rules/administrative procedures: Do they stipulate conflict sensitivity? Could procedures increase tensions in the context?
- Flexibility: How flexible are research plans? Capacity of adaptation?
- Communication: How is the purpose of the research communicated? To whom? Expectation management? Feedback of results? «Translation» of research results? Confidentiality?
- Staffing: Recruitment criteria for research assistants?
- Funding: Specific funding for a conflict sensitive approach?
- Coordination with other research projects/sectors: Did they already work with the respondents? Experiences? Overlaps?
- Security of the researcher and respondents? Who is responsible?



# Conflict Sensitivity: Step 3




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# Step 3: Develop options


Developing options:

- There is no blueprint!
- Decide whether to continue or not/ develop criteria
- Decide which adaptations you prioritize based on:
  - Balance context and research needs
  - Your sphere of influence
  - Funding
- Sometimes it is just about being aware and smart communication.

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# Open questions from practice regarding conflict sensitivity

- Conflict sensitivity increases effectiveness and it creates momentum for a peaceful transition. Experiences but no evidence!
- Conflict sensitivity goes through “cycles of popularity”. What makes this concept “a la mode”?
- Conflict sensitivity requires a thorough self-reflection on the position and role of an external actor in local context – this is highly political and creates resistances.

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# Open questions?

And up for discussion....

...is a conflict sensitive approach to research in conflict affected areas necessary, meaningful and applicable?

...What are opportunities and risks?

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