

Conflict Analysis

To be effective, you need to understand the context in which you are working. This understanding will help ensure that your dialogue process meets the needs of the stakeholders and improves conflict dynamics, rather than worsening them.

This is where conflict analysis comes in. A conflict analysis is an ongoing process in which you engage stakeholders to learn about their experiences in a conflict situation.

Here are some elements you'll want to consider in your analysis:

First, The Issue.

Key questions you can ask to understand the issue are "What is the problem or conflict?" "What are the underlying issues?" "What are the various dimensions of the problem – are they political, social, economic, cultural?"

Often times the problem will be framed quite differently depending on which stakeholder you speak to. Remember to ensure that all perspectives are represented in your inquiry and afterwards, in how you frame the problem.

Second, the actors.

Who are the parties involved in the problem or conflict? Who holds power? Who are the spoilers – meaning people who might benefit from the failure of your dialogue process? Besides just naming who the actors are, it is important to spend time deeply understanding their concerns and fears. This requires strong, active listening skills. Try to find out what the relationships between the actors are, whether they are communicating with each other, and how open they will be to joining a dialogue. This will help you set an acceptable time frame for your dialogue process. If the parties are not yet ready to sit in the same room, you might have to invest some time working with them separately.

Third, the history

When exploring the context, look beyond the most recent clashes in order to uncover the root causes. Seek to find out the events that led up to the current problem or conflict. It may have unfolded over years, decades, or even centuries. Also, include peace-making efforts in your exploration of the history of the conflict. What has already been done to address the problem at hand, and in what ways have these interventions been successful, or not? How can your process complement, or build on, these efforts?

There are three key points to remember about conflict analysis:

- **First**, it is a process and not a single activity. Even when you feel like you deeply understand the context, it can change quickly, so continue to seek information.
- **Second**, following the principle of joint ownership, involve stakeholders early and often in your efforts to understand the context.
- **Third**, be mindful that the questions you ask of stakeholders will likely bring up sensitive and difficult subjects. Your assessment is also a form of intervention.

Source

Designing Community-Based Dialogue, Ariana Barth, United States Institute of Peace