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# **A FEMINIST APPROACH TO CONFLICT SENSITIVITY**

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## **WHAT IS CONFLICT SENSITIVITY?**

Conflict sensitivity is the ability to **understand** the intended and unintended effects of an intervention and to **make decisions** to minimise negative impacts and contribute to positive change.

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## **KVINNA TILL KVINNA**

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The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has defended women's rights since 1993. For every woman and girl's right to be safe and to be heard.

Today, we are one of the world's leading feminist women's rights organisations, working directly in areas affected by war and conflict to strengthen the influence and power of all women. We work closely together with more than 100 partner organisations in 20 countries to defend women's rights, achieve gender equality and justice, and reach lasting feminist peace.

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## HOW KVINNA TILL KVINNA APPLIES CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

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Kvinna till Kvinna uses a conflict sensitive approach in all of our operations and work.

Kvinna till Kvinna has documentation and guidelines on our conflict sensitivity approach, Do No Harm analysis, conflict analysis and context analysis. We have also integrated conflict sensitivity into all aspects of our programme handbook which guides our offices and programmes.

### **HOW IT HELPS US IN OUR WORK**

We use a conflict sensitivity approach because it gives us and partner organisations the space to challenge assumptions, identify our understandings of conflict and build strong programmes that can respond to conflict dynamics and issues.

Conflict sensitivity tools and methods provide us with a way to assess and analyse how our programmes interact with the context, conflict and power dynamics. We then can use this knowledge to adapt our programmes to best achieve our, and partner organisations', vision and goals.

As we all bring biases, assumptions and our own experiences, applying conflict sensitivity allows us to question, reflect and analyse so that we can build smart programming.

In addition, conflict sensitivity can help us break down the silos in our work—and our results. How can we respond to complex issues with linear responses?

## **THE KVINNA TILL KVINNA APPROACH**

### **A FEMINIST UNDERSTANDING OF CONFLICT SENSITIVITY**

Kvinna till Kvinna worked together with CDA Collaborative to build internal staff knowledge about conflict sensitivity and how to apply Do No Harm to our programmes. This included several workshops in programme countries and in Stockholm. In 2018, we jointly published a Do No Harm & Gender Guidance note which illustrated how Do No Harm analysis could better integrate gender.

For us it has always been important that integrating a gendered perspective does not become a tick-box exercise and instead helps to enrich conflict sensitivity analysis and adaptations.

Conflict sensitivity is a holistic approach and mindset. There is no quick fix solution. Instead, it requires constant analysis, questioning and adaptation—things that are essential to a feminist analysis.

## **Power**

On top of the conflict dynamics that exist, we operate programmes in contexts with structural patriarchal power dynamics. For our work, we need to understand the intersections of the root causes and structures maintaining war, violence, inequalities and disempowerment. This requires extensive analysis of the context before operating and close monitoring throughout the programme. This is why power analysis and self-reflection are key components of our application of programmes during the programme cycle.

## **Long-term support**

Based on our understanding of the structures that maintain violence, conflict and inequality, we also understand our programming exists in environments that do not have linear paths towards greater levels of peace and equality. One of the most important things we do as an organisation to apply conflict sensitivity is to implement a long-term approach to change, based on our belief that partner organisations are best places to understand conflict dynamics and which activities are appropriate at which time.

## **Partnership approach**

Kvinna till Kvinna works with a partnership approach that means that we support the locally owned agendas of organisations working in their own communities, countries, or regions. One of our partnership principles is conflict sensitivity and we work together with partner organisations to support the analysis and actions needed to implement this approach. Through

constant dialogue, networking meetings, field visits and other monitoring tools, we work together with partner organisations to ensure conflict sensitivity in all activities.

## **Supporting diversity**

In each context, Kvinna till Kvinna also works with several organisations representing diverse groups, perspectives, and experiences. Based on our thorough context and conflict analysis, we ensure that we are supporting diverse groups across conflict and societal divides. This way we do not cause further harm by our involvement and avoid any bias (or perceived bias).

## **Intersectionality**

We believe that intersectionality is key to having a conflict sensitivity approach. We do not see women as a homogenous group and reduce them to which 'side' of a conflict they belong to, as each individual has agency and different experiences and needs. We recognise that women have a wide diversity of experiences and lived realities. Therefore, we have an intersectional feminist approach to address the specific needs of different groups of women and support diverse feminist movements. Our definition of women is also inclusive and refers to all persons who self-identify as women. Although tools like data disaggregation is a good starting point to understand gender in programming, we do not merely stop at counting the number of women included but rather support diverse women's organisations and movements who each have different ways of working and operating.

### **Opportunities for peace**

Kvinna till Kvinna understands violence as occurring on a continuum—and not confined to situations that are defined as ‘war’ or ‘active violent conflict’. This reinforces to us how important conflict sensitivity is in all of our programming, even in the post-conflict areas where we operate, as we are always working in contexts with changing violent dynamics. To ensure that we are responding to any potential harms, we use tools, such as Do No Harm. However, Do No Harm can often primarily focus on a ‘negative peace’ understanding and we go further by exploring a ‘positive peace’ (which we call feminist peace), which also means that we constantly seek opportunities for peace in any types of activities.

### **Security & safety**

The security and safety partner organisations are extremely important to us. We are proactive and careful in assessing how the context affects our partner organisations. When conflicts and other emerging issues outbreak, we stay in close contact with partner organisations throughout the situation. As the anti-gender movement grows and other threats to the rights and safety of

women human rights defenders continue, Kvinna till Kvinna ensures that we do not exacerbate or risk the security of these actors. We do this through analysing the potential risks of every action we take—from programming to visibility. We aim to safely support organisations facing threats and harms, as well as provide appropriate opportunities for increased dialogue, information and trustbuilding before and when conflict emerges.

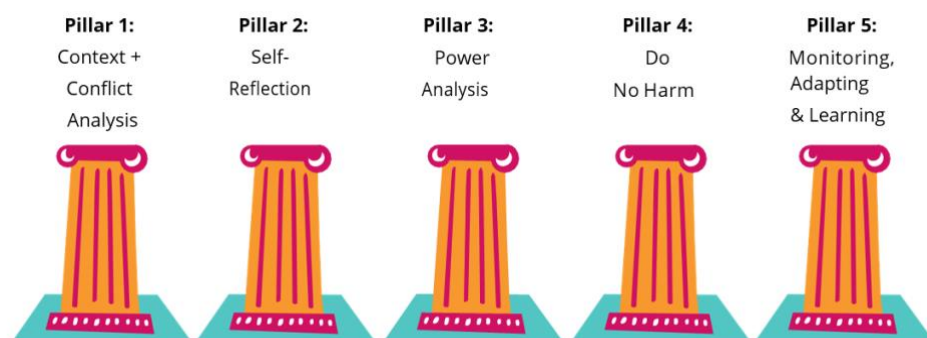
### **Decolonialisation**

Conflict sensitivity is also linked to decolonialisation. International aid is political, and actors like Kvinna till Kvinna play a role in ensuring that our support to partner organisations is grounded in local needs and realities. We are committed to recognising and responding to this through our conflict sensitivity’s pillars on self-reflection and power analysis. Kvinna till Kvinna also believes that a localisation approach can be best achieved through our national and regional offices, where topic and contextual experts constantly analyse the context and work with partner organisations to support their work in the changing environment.

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# APPLYING CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IN PROGRAMMING

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## PILLAR APPROACH

Conflict Sensitivity is a comprehensive approach—there is no one action you can take that will fulfil your conflict sensitivity commitments or a quick fix before or after a programme/project. Instead, we must see it as a mindset—it needs to be there throughout the programme cycle, but also in everything we do as a donor or actor in the countries where we work.

We see conflict sensitivity as a set of pillars that serve as the foundation for our programme. We don't always work linearly, but we can use and strengthen different pillars as necessary during the programme.

*Context analyses* help us to understand the location where we are working and get to know the local women's rights organisations and movements there.

A *conflict analysis* investigates both overarching conflict dynamics and specific dynamics in the areas where the programme will be located.

For Kvinna till Kvinna, power and self-reflection are important parts of conflict

sensitivity that aren't always emphasised by other actors.

The *self-reflection pillar* is about understanding and reflecting on how gender, race, age, education, and other aspects of your identity impact your assumptions, positions, and the programme.

The *power pillar* helps to map out power relations and understand how we as Kvinna till Kvinna and individuals fit into it.

The *Do No Harm pillar* is a tool to assess a programme's potential harm and identify positive outcomes and contributions.

The *monitoring, adapting and learning pillar* is focused on fine-tuning and responding to new dynamics in the programme throughout its implementation and to evaluate the programme when it is finished.

These pillars help us to analyse the different levels that impact programming. Our team and individuals aim to understand their impact on the context and programming. Self-

reflection and power analysis can help draw these points out. At the programme level, we bring what you've learnt from the team and individual levels to understand how together this impact's the programme's goals.

#### **ADAPTABLE TO THE CONTEXT**

Although these pillars follow the flow of programme design and implementation, they can be adapted to the context. The best application of conflict sensitivity is when it is self-owned.

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## **HOW WE SUPPORT CONFLICT SENSITIVITY**

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We support greater conflict sensitivity by:

- Frequently updating our **internal procedures and tools** to ensure conflict sensitivity is integrated in all aspects of our work from recruitment and anti-corruption policies to reporting templates for partner organisations.
- We regularly **research and publish reports** on the perspectives of women human rights defenders and how they see changes in their context. These reports are evidence-based, local accounts that are useful as a conflict sensitivity tool to understand how programme interventions are affecting the context.
- We **support partner organisations** to apply conflict sensitivity through dialogue, organising exchange spaces where they can analyse with other actors in a safe space.
- We also provide **tools and methods** on conflict sensitivity, including e-learning courses, internal toolkits and guidelines.
- We **advocate** towards international stakeholders and donors about the importance of conflict sensitivity, particularly the need to further integrate gender into these analyses and policy decisions.

For all women's rights, in every corner of the world.  
Visit [kvinnatillkvinna.org](https://kvinnatillkvinna.org) to find out more about our work.