



STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR PEACE-RELEVANT WORK

The picture on the previous page provides an overall framework to structure the process and conversations of strategic planning for peace-relevant work in a given environment.

The objective of a strategic planning exercise is to come to step 6: What is going to be our strategic focus, and why?

Steps 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 all provide information and considerations that –taken together- will shape the choices made in step 6.

Steps 7, 8 and 9 flow from the choices made in step 6.

Let us go through this again with a bit more explanation:

Step 1: Accepting that forms of ‘conflict’ will always occur within any human society, we analyse not only what are the drivers of conflict and which factors contribute to it, but also what the existing capacities are and what articulated strategies might already be pursued to manage the conflict dynamics without resort to major violence or coercion. This is what we commonly refer to as a ‘conflict analysis’ or a ‘peace and security’ or ‘peace and development’ analysis.

Step 2 and 3: Step 2 and 3 look more attentively at what others are already doing or trying to do to reduce the violence and create a more constructive dynamics. In Step 2 we consider what the authorities, often the national or local government, are doing or want to do, as we need to decide how we will position ourselves towards these plans or ongoing effort. In Step 3 we consider what other actors (local, regional, international) are doing. This is not to say that because someone else is already working on an important aspect of the conflict dynamics or peace capacities, we cannot also engage with it. We might find opportunities to strengthen or complement the actions of others. So these steps are both a mapping but also to a degree an assessment/appreciation exercise of what and how others are doing.

Step 4 looks ahead at possible scenarios that could develop within the period of our strategic planning horizon. Here we can reflect on trends, and consider possible game-changing trigger events or development that would significantly alter the dynamics in the environment (e.g. elections are won by the political opposition; foreign troops enter the environment etc.) This is of course relevant, certainly when it comes to our programming choices (step 8) but possibly also in terms of our strategic positioning and strategic choices (step 6). (It is possible to turn this forward-looking step into Step 2, as long as it then doesn’t fade into the background by the time we are ready to consider our choices in Step 6. The question under Step 6 “how to maintain preparedness to respond to significant scenario changes” can also help to ensure we don’t lose sight of the possibility of developments that may require a review not only of our programmatic portfolio but of our whole strategy.

Step 5 invites us to consider our own mandate, possible generic or worldwide ‘priorities’, our acknowledged strengths and weaknesses etc. If we have been working in this environment for some

time already, we should also be considering what the learning points are from our experience so far – and perhaps from the experiences of others (Step 2 and 3).

The combination of our analysis, our review of what the national/local authorities and others are doing, possible scenarios, and our own ‘given’, strengths and learning, should provide us with the elements for a reasoned choice (the ‘why’) in [Step 6](#) of where we want to strategically concentrate on. No matter how well resourced and big we are, we are still only at best going to be making a ‘contribution’ to a higher level strategic goal: this is the moment to articulate why and how that will be the case.

The following steps take us further towards the actions we will now undertake within the strategic framework we have decided upon in [Step 6](#).

[Step 7](#) invites reflection and clarification of how we will work together. It is better to this at this point and not after having made the choices of action, because collaboration may be required or desirable in how we make the choices of the actions we will undertake and/or support.

[Step 8](#) invites us to spell out or articulate key criteria and considerations that we will take into account and if needed weigh against each other to assess different possible course of actions, programmes, projects, partners or collaborators. Here we can include the consideration that the possible or proposed action has to be strategically relevant, in light of the conflict & peace analysis ([Step 1](#)) and possible our scenario thinking ([Step 4](#)) but of course also in light of the strategic choices we have made ([Step 6](#)). Each action or programme or project will then have its own internal logic and its own ‘theory of change’ of how achieving its more modest ‘objectives’ or ‘outcomes’ will meaningfully contribute to a larger desirable change. Another consideration to take into account might also be our capacity to adequately manage a certain (number of) actions, programmes, projects. Trade-offs might be required between quantity and quality – if we only have a limited number of skilled people that are able to properly support/oversee certain types of actions/interventions, then perhaps we should not try and do or support too many things at the same time.

[Step 9](#) makes us look ahead to how we are going to review the actions we undertake and/or support. The word chosen here is clearly ‘review’ and not ‘monitoring’ or ‘evaluation’, although that depends on a certain understanding of these terms. ‘Review’ means to signal that it has to be a periodic reflective exercise, that pays critical attention to the assumptions that are at play in the design and planning of the action, but also the continued strategic relevance in what is perhaps a changing environment. This goes beyond ‘monitoring’ if this is interpreted as checking whether things run according to the work plan. Periodic ‘strategic’ reviews also take place while the action is ongoing so that adaptive measures are possible, rather than wait for an ‘end-of-action’ evaluation when it may be too late to adapt and adjust. What we learn from those reviews can make us modify how specific actions were designed, or the actions we choose to engage in ([Step 8](#)) but could potentially also make us reflect again on our strategic framework ([Step 6](#)).