Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA): Lessons from Pakistan

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Abstract

In the early 1990s, on the basis of prior experiences of International Development Agencies (IDAs) in conflict zones, a need was identified to explore, understand and carefully address impacts of such projects. In response to concerns regarding development and humanitarian interventions in conflict zones, the concept of Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) evolved. PCIA emphasizes that IDAs need to conduct conflict analyses at key points during and before entering into project cycles in conflict or conflict-prone areas, to ensure peace and conflict sensitivity. This paper provides a critical analysis of PCIA as adapted by IDAs in Pakistan. It is shown that an understanding of PCIA is non-existent at the grassroots-level, and that there is a lack of comprehension of such tools at a project-level. The gap between theory and practice is analyzed and several recommendations are offered.

The development of instruments to ensure the conflict-sensitive orientation of development work was given a high priority after the so-called ‘Rwanda-shock’ in 1994. Following this, It was recognized that development cooperation has often had unintended impacts on the existing peace and conflict dynamics, and that development interventions are never neutral in conflict zones (Schmelzle 2005). This led to discussions regarding the political role of development cooperation in conflict ridden areas. Highly motivated debates resulted in development and application of instruments to ensure conflict-sensitive orientation of the development projects, such as “Do no harm” (Anderson 1999) and “PCIA” (Bush 1998).

Several examples regarding the application of PCIA in IDA projects have been observed in the 21st century. Tools of conflict sensitivity have been utilized throughout the decade, and have necessitated the need to further explore the application and impact of PCIA by looking into the experiences of PCIA users in conflict prone regions. The ultimate objective of this paper is to look into the application of PCIA and related tools in Pakistan, by bringing in insights from the work of IDAs in the country. Most parts of the country are home to rising extremism, sectarianism and militancy, therefore it is worthwhile to analyze the way in which PCIA tools have been put into practice at project levels. The purpose of this paper is also to share some lessons from Pakistan for the benefit of development workers in Pakistan and beyond.

The findings of this research suggest that more context specific lessons are required to shape PCIA into something which will be mutually beneficial to all stakeholders. Moreover, the paper analyzes some of the key issues related to implementing PCIA in the field from a local perspective. It intends to open up a much-needed discussion with respect to the role of PCIA and other related tools, at the interface, between international and local organizations, in conflict environments and touches issues such as power relations, skill transfers and the overall value of supposedly universal tools.

However, it should be noted that the paper is not a comprehensive analysis of all IDAs’ projects in Pakistan vis-à-vis PCIA and related tools, due to the limited number of project samples obtained within the country. This research is based on the researcher’s direct exposure to PCIA from 2006 to 2008 and a three-month period of fieldwork from November 2006 to January 2007 in Swat, Swabi and D.I. Khan. During the fieldwork, face-to-face interviews and focus groups discussions were conducted with PCIA developers, practitioners and implementers (staff of IDAs and partnering NGOs).

Conflict Context

Besides internal conflicts in Pakistan, there are a number of external/regional conflicts, influencing the socio-political state of affairs and security of the country. Pakistan faces a resurgence of nationalists (mainly in Baluchistan and Sindh), sectarian violence, the volatility of Afghanistan to the west, insurgency-ridden Kashmir to
the north, and an ongoing conflict with India. Overall, the following six structural weaknesses in Pakistan have been identified to be producing and sustaining conflicts (FES 2005:1-2):

1. Special role of the military in socio-political and economic affairs;
2. Strongly manifested socio-economic disparities within the country;
3. Restricted chances of participation for civil society in political, economic and social development;
4. Segregation of the genders and distinctive gender inequalities;
5. Presence of various regional, sub-regional and local identities against weak or non-existing collective national identity; and
6. Prevalence of reciprocal stereotypes and hostile perceptions against some of the local groups and the international community.

The frequency of terrorists’ attacks in Pakistan has drastically increased since the country initiated the war against terrorist groups in the tribal areas, bordering Afghanistan. As a consequence, a portion of the country is observed to be flooded with the local militants that are involved in terrorist activities.

In relation to that, there have been several attacks reported on the local army, police and the public places. Furthermore, there have also been a number of attacks on people from the West, such as the brutal murder of Daniel Pearl[1], the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore, the targeted killing of aid workers and attacks on offices of NGOs.

In 2008, a suicide bomb devastated the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad that killed at least 53 people and injured over 200 (BBC 2008). Earlier, there was an attack on an Italian restaurant in Islamabad, Luna Caprese, which injured five staff members of the US embassy (Rondeaux 2008). These attacks were well planned and targeted favorite spots of the country’s elites and foreigners. The anti-West attitudes increased after a Danish newspaper published blasphemous cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in 2007 following which, several other Danish newspapers reprinted them in February 2008. In reaction to that, a bomb was blasted outside the Danish Embassy in Islamabad (Perlez & Shah 2008). Aggression against Western elements has been the common response of extremists in Pakistan, but occasionally this has also affected the lives of minority Christians in the country.

Since the revival of democracy in Pakistan in 2008, there have been a number of positive developments observed along with the return of the army to its constitutional role and restoration of the rightful and free judiciary. In relation to conflict analysis (FES 2005), at present a significant change with regards to civil-military relations involving the democratic government is taking place to ensure sovereignty of the parliament. One example is of a landmark development is that, in June 2008, the country’s defense budget for the fiscal year 2008-09 was debated in the parliament.

In February 2009, the Pakistani government, troubled with numerous domestic and international issues, reached a ceasefire agreement with the Tehrik-i-Nifaaz-i-Shariat-i-Muhammadi (TNSM) to establish peace in the turbulent Swat valley, which is the movement for the implementation of the Prophet Muhammad’s Sharia (Islamic law). For well over a decade, the TNSM was penetrating in the local areas with the help of local Taliban. Its anti-secular education operations are alleged to have destroyed around 300 schools in the region, primarily girls’ schools. Since October 2007, violent clashes became severe in Swat between Pakistan security forces and approximately 3,000 militants (Ahmed 2009:30-31). There was an agreement reached between the TNSM and the government, which allowed the former to implement the Sharia in the Swat valley region. The democratic government could not bypass the parliament and the parliament unanimously passed a resolution to support President Zardari’s decision to sign the peace deal, irrespective of concerns regarding human rights abuses in Swat under the militants’ rule. Ultimately, the agreement proved to be fruitless and the security forces had to completely remove militants from Swat in 2009.

It is palpable that, in the presence of several structural flaws in Pakistan, the country is prone to conflicts at various levels and thus needs the application of tools such as PCIA.

Kenneth Bush answers the question: where should PCIA be done?

PCIA should certainly be embedded in project located in “hot” war zones. However, they should also apply to initiatives in a far wider range of conflict-prone settings that is; places where there is a risk that non-violent conflict may turn (or return) to violence. This includes areas: (1) where there control over, or use of, territory or resources is disputed; (2) where the socio-economic gap between groups is increasing; or (3) where unemployment is rising while living standards and human security are declining (2003:5).

Since 9/11, at the international level, there has been a policy shift towards Pakistan, as the US-led war against terrorism started to focus on the terrorists’ safe havens in the country’s tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. The NATO
forces in Afghanistan also made several pre-emptive strikes into the Pakistani tribal areas, which further caused the increase in animosity towards the center and the West since the people living in the tribal areas of Pakistan have ethnic ties with a significant group of people in Afghanistan. Therefore, the war on terror has channelled a lot of funding from the US and dozens of IDAs to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly known as the North-West Frontier Province) for projects on education, women’s empowerment, environmental security, infrastructural development and so on. The West paid a lot of attention to the socio-political environment of these areas, such as the “Understanding FATA” project supported by the British High Commission in Pakistan. Similar initiatives are also being heavily funded by IDAs, in particular USAID. However, much more than mere understanding of the conflict context is required and we have to see how various IDAs in the country have attempted to address conflicts of various kinds and levels, especially by integrating PCIA in their national level development of strategic objectives and planning of projects to contribute to conflict transformation in conflict and conflict-prone areas of Pakistan. Prior to sharing the findings of this study, it is pertinent to introduce PCIA, existing PCIA models, and discuss existing arguments about PCIA and related tools.

**Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA)**

Most evaluation research and tools coming from the international development community focus on assessing outcomes of development interventions. Little attention has been devoted to adapting these development evaluations into contexts faced with violence (Paffenholz et al. 2005). Increasingly, there has been an understanding of the fact that no actor could be entirely neutral in the context of violent conflict and all development interventions have the potential to have unintended negative impacts on the context faced with conflict (KOFF 2004), hence a need was felt in the circle of IDAs to develop concepts and tools to assess impacts of development projects in conflict and conflict-prone zones.

In the early 1990s, in response to relevant concerns, development actors started to discuss the need for specific evaluating tools for project areas faced with conflict and for conflict-prone zones. In the beginning, these concerns were accepted by the 36 OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) member states and by the United Nations, and, as a result, by several IDAs. Due to this Western acceptance, several conflict-sensitive tools were designed and implemented. Specifically, an approach called the Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) (Bush 1998) was developed in conjunction with the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

The evolution of PCIA is classified by Paffenholz (2005) into the following three stages:

1. **1996-1999**: This era is characterized by a recognition of the potential impacts of aid interventions on conflict dynamics and peace processes and the subsequent development of tools to address this issue, such as the “Do no harm” approach of Mary B. Anderson (1999) and the PCIA approach of Kenneth Bush (1998). The approaches were well received and quickly implemented by hundreds of IDAs in areas faced with conflicts.
2. **1999-2004**: This was a developmental period, with dozens of tools related to conflict-sensitive project planning and management emerging, mainly inspired by peace research. These tools were either developed by IDAs or developed for them. During this period, some confusion emerged due to various tools of conflict analysis carrying the same label of PCIA.
3. **The third phase starts from 2004 and continues**: This phase is characterized by greater perplexity in defining PCIA due to the existence of so many different concepts and tools. Several IDAs have replaced the term “PCIA” with “conflict-sensitive development” and other similar terms, in an attempt to focus directly on conflict without being distracted by the broad range of activities under peace-building.

The PCIA approach is based on the assumption that any development program, in any context currently experiencing conflict or in a post-conflict state, may cause unintended negative consequences. This approach goes beyond simple project assessment as it is intended to promote conflict-sensitivity through greater awareness of the interaction between development projects and project contexts. A central developer of the PCIA methodology, Kenneth Bush, states: “PCIA is a means of anticipating, monitoring, and evaluating the ways in which an intervention may affect or has affected the dynamics of peace or conflict in a conflict-prone region” (Bush 2003:3).

It is important to highlight that the “Do no harm” (Anderson 1999) approach is limited since it is aimed at emphasizing the negative impacts of development interventions on areas faced with conflicts. In comparison, the PCIA approach is comprehensive in nature with equal emphasis on both the conflict dynamics and peace processes in a particular project area. PCIA is employed at two levels: macro and micro. Macro or country level PCIA is performed prior to planning of aid, which is useful for strategic planning at the headquarters of IDAs. In the country
level analysis, the national implications of conflict(s) are assessed for designing relevant strategies to reduce the harmful effects of conflicts. PCIA at the micro or a project level is handy for project staff responsible for ensuring the successful implementation of projects. At this level, the primary focus is on defining local dimensions of major factors causing, triggering or aggravating tensions, to formulate enabling strategies to act in response to conflicts.

It is worth underscoring the point that PCIA does not evaluate the effectiveness of a development project against its stated objectives rather it evaluates the project against indicators in connection to peace and conflict dynamics. It therefore helps to make decisions on how to design, implement, and evaluate any project, in an effort to maximize opportunities for peace-building and minimize the risks of conflict (Besancon 2005).

**PCIA Models**

Several PCIA models have been developed but without any significant differences. Organizations have developed specific PCIA models by considering PCIA’s compatibility with their organizational goals and capacity. The PCIA model presented (Diagram 1) is adapted from the work of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES 2007). This model thus far has proven to take care of most of the criticisms of PCIA. There are five stages in PCIA process (FES 2007:4-5):

1. **Conflict analysis:** This exercise is conducted to ensure the conflict-sensitive orientation of development interventions and helps in providing entry points in particular contexts;
2. **Courses of action:** Systematic incorporation of recommendations stemming from the country or a project-level conflict analysis into the project planning;
3. **Conflict-sensitive project planning:** At this stage strategies are defined and activities are planned along with development of SMART indicators. PCIA must always be sensitive to the project context, for example to conflict dynamics, peace processes etc. (Hoffman 2003:19);
4. **Conflict monitoring:** is about monitoring changes of conflict dynamics and progress in peace initiatives, since the implementation of the project; and
5. **Validation of impact hypotheses:** considers the impacts of a development project on conflict dynamics and peace processes, as well as adaptation of project planning with impact hypotheses.

The “Aid for Peace” approach is introduced by Paffenholz (2005) and builds on the existing debates on PCIA. This model provides answers and possible solutions to criticism faced by PCIA theories and practices. Since the commencement of debates about “conflict sensitivity” and PCIA, the development world has been flooded with concepts, guidelines and tools on PCIA and this is the reason that, to-date, we find no commonly agreed understanding of PCIA. Many PCIA concepts and tools are developed in connection with the objectives of a particular organization, and many IDAs have been reinventing the wheel as the intended objectives of PCIA have remained the same. However, according to Paffenholz, not all PCIA approaches are built on the original concept. PCIA approaches have in common the comprehensive task of conflict analysis, formulation of recommendations to adjust programs in a particular context to reduce possible unintended impacts on conflict and to enhance contribution to peace-building (2005:3). The Aid for Peace approach differs from the PCIA of Bush (1998) in that it focuses on the peace-building needs of a particular country or area and tailors projects’ objectives to the identified needs through peace-building relevance analysis. On the other hand, this model builds upon PCIA and focuses on developing conflict and peace result-chains and indicators for impact assessment of a particular intervention on conflict dynamics and peace.
processes (Paffenholz 2005:5). A shortcoming of PCIA (FES 2007) and the Aid for Peace approach (Paffenholz 2005) is that they propose almost the same sets of procedures to be adopted in conflict and conflict-prone zones and cater for the needs of IDAs without mentioning anything regarding developing peace and conflict sensitive implementation plans in consultation with partnering organizations at the local levels.

PCIA and IDAs in Pakistan

During the period of my direct exposure to PCIA, I observed that PCIA and conflict sensitivity in project management are “alien concepts” for the majority of the project staff of non-government organizations (NGOs) in Pakistan. Thus, the benefits of these tools are unknown to them. In a group discussion with NGO fieldworkers in Swat, I inquired about PCIA and similar concepts, and received the response: “what is PCIA?” Clearly, concerns are to be raised on the effectiveness of PCIA when implementers at the grass-root level are absolutely unaware of such a tool. Examples of PCIA in Pakistan are few, and difficult to access, as most organizations (IDAs) keep PCIA-related work confidential. There are a couple of well-known PCIA related examples, however, which come from the work of a German foundation called Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) through their country offices in Pakistan. Both the FES and the SDC have prepared complex procedures and tools related to PCIA (FES 2007; SDC 2006), and also have trained local staff in Pakistan in this respect.

The Aid for Peace model fits very well as a supplement to the PCIA model (FES 2007) as it is more comprehensive in nature with certain sets of procedures that are carried out until the project is implemented. However, after the implementation of a particular project there was a felt need for certain procedures, provided in the given PCIA model, for conflict monitoring at required instances after the execution of a project in order to adapt a particular project under existing circumstances at the project-level. Paffenholz (2005:13) provides an example of an FES project in Afghanistan. Similarly, I would like to share an example from the FES Pakistan office, which conducted a comprehensive national-level conflict analysis in 2007 to explore the entry point in relation to the organization’s strategic objectives.

A country specific conflict analysis makes donor policies more sensitive to local socio-political dynamics, and if carried out on regular basis, offers projects opportunities to continue to adjust in response to changing circumstances (Hoffman 2003:27). The FES conflict analysis specifically explored how, across the country, the youth was at risk of being exploited by extremist elements; and rising civil-military conflict. Therefore, the FES country office developed the following three projects:

1. Young Professionals’ Network (YPN): this project was created with the aim of empowering the marginalized young people across the country. The participants were selected from neglected areas of Pakistan and were provided with training on various issues/topics such as, communication skills, conflict transformation, project management and leadership skills. The intended outcome of this project was the capacity building of selected participants to enable them to play a significant role in the country’s development.

2. Youth Parliament: this project was launched in an effort to provide a capacity building oriented platform for politically oriented youth to voice their concerns on political issues of Pakistan. The aim of this project was to bring a new generation of perspective politicians in Pakistan to strengthen the existing institution of democracy. The project was initiated in 2006, when General Pervez Musharraf was the head of the state.

3. Civil-Military Dialogue was designed to provide a platform for former servicemen of armed forces and civil society members to debate on a range of issues to resolve the rising civil-military conflict in the country. The project was implemented with the objective of initiating debates on the constitutional role of army in the country, to ensure the sovereignty of democracy.

The FES implemented these projects in 2006 and in the following year, 2007, conducted an exercise on conflict monitoring in project areas to adjust projects in response to changes in peace and conflict dynamics.

The FES offices in Afghanistan and Pakistan implemented the above given PCIA model (FES 2007), similar to the Aid for Peace approach of Paffenholz (2005). The FES case differs from the case of other IDAs in Pakistan, for instance, the case of the SDC, which initially implemented projects in conflict-prone areas and later decided to aid in the conduct of a conflict-sensitive impact assessment with the aim of identifying unintended negative impacts of projects on conflict dynamics.

IDAs are perceived with much suspicion in Pakistan, like the rest of the Western organizations that are perceived to be supporting the US agenda, or supporting the anti-Islamic motives of the Western world in Muslim countries by
promoting Western values under the camouflage of development assistances (field note 1). This reaction towards IDAs mostly relates to aid coming from the USA. There is historical evidence justifying this attitude of people towards IDAs: “US financial and military assistance to Pakistan has always come with strings attached – and it will be used to tweak the Pakistani establishment whenever the need arises” (Siddiq 2007:35).

Field Note 1: I met the people working with the SDC in Swat, Swabi and D.I. Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The staff told me that they initially faced problems due to their offices and vehicles having the Swiss cross, which is prominent on the SDC logo. The backward and conservative local communities perceived the Swiss cross as the Christian cross. Therefore, in the beginning, the SDC staff had to persuade the local communities that their projects were not motivated by a faith-based propaganda from the West.

In February 2008, armed men opened fire and hurled grenades at the office of a British-run aid agency (Plan International) in Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Four people were killed in the incident and ten wounded. This region of Pakistan is known to possess pro-Taliban militants, who have bombed the offices of NGOs in the past, alleging that IDAs are trying to undermine their version of true Islam. In addition, Mansehra until recently was a base for militants operating in Afghanistan and hence the anti-Western sentiment has grown significantly since the US-led war against terrorism in Afghanistan and neighboring tribal areas in Pakistan started. For example, in November 2009, Stephan D. Vance, working for the US-funded Federal Demonstrative Partnership was killed in Peshawar (Perlez 2008). After this incident, there were concerns from the US and several donor agencies as to how their money could be effective if their workers are unable to visit project areas? Partner organizations of IDAs are also not safe from these attacks, as in April 2009 there was an attack on workers of a Mansehra based NGO funded by USAID. Three local female workers along with their male driver were kidnapped and killed. NGOs are considered to be in conflict with local communities that perceive them as western agents (examples given in field notes 2 & 3). A common belief is that attacks on NGOs happen because these organizations employ women workers and organize mixed social gatherings in line with their professed policies on gender equality and gender mainstreaming (BBC 2009).

Attacks on aid workers are not exclusive to Pakistan: in the period from 2006 to 2008, three quarters of total attacks on aid workers took place in the following countries that are faced with armed conflicts (in descending order): Sudan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Chad, Iraq and Pakistan. As identified, there could be the following reasons for attacks on aid workers: (1) aid workers are perceived as friends of the “enemy”; a government, a rebel group or a foreign power; (2) the attacked organization could be a primary target; or (3) to block the delivery of aid to a particular group of people (Stoddard et al. 2009:4-5).

Most of the development projects in Pakistan, like in many other countries, are implemented with the help of partnering (local) NGOs. It is rare for IDAs to execute any project on their own, as most of them do realize their limitations in a context that is not very well-known to them, linguistically and culturally. On the evaluating side, IDAs try to take possible steps to ensure the effective implementation of their projects. However, when it comes to the application of PCIA, there seems to be a lot of confusion in the circle of IDAs in Pakistan. Either it is an unfamiliar concept to the project staff at local levels or it is not well understood. It has been found that mostly the local staff
considers PCIA as an extra task or a burden on them. Therefore, not much interest is observed to be shown in learning PCIA tools and methodologies.

After meeting with the local project staff of IDAs, discussing PCIA, conflict sensitivity and so on, I was frequently encountered with the question: why do we need it for projects on youth development, women’s empowerment, for promotion of human rights and democracy, trade unions etc.? And during the course of my research, I found that most of them have suspicions attached to PCIA and related tools, and they perceive it as yet another evaluating tool coming from the West and thus something which they don’t find relevant to their work. The local people working for IDAs directly or indirectly also believe that the outsiders (donors) do not “entirely” know their context and, therefore, even if there is a conceptual agreement on the use of PCIA, there is a huge gap between the theory and practice because the local staff are the ones who are directly in communication with partnering or implementing organizations. In the words of Mark Hoffman: “The gap between theory and practice has not yet been closed; the various efforts at PCIA are, so far, a practical dead end” (2003:34). It is significant to note that the ones implementing, the local partners, have no theoretical background on what PCIA is about. It was found that at the implementing end, IDAs are yet to clearly answer the following question: “who are PCIA’s for?” (Hoffman 2003:34). It seems this is the overall case with the application of PCIA in different countries, as similar were the experiences from Sri Lanka: “Undue emphasis on complex tools, tables and methodologies seems to be a primarily Western approach that often has a limited resonance with many Southern organizations” (Barbolet et al. 2005:2). I have gathered enough evidence in this study to support the hypothesis of Marc Howard Ross that the PCIA concept “is not yet sufficiently user friendly” (2003:78) due to its unclear, complex and broad nature.

There is a visible disagreement observed between donors and aid facilitators working for IDAs in countries receiving aid, and presence of such a conflict also constrains the execution of PCIA. This finding is also validated by Neufeldt by highlighting differences in practical sense for workers of IDAs and national NGOs. “Because their views often clash during program design, monitoring and evaluation processes, and leave both sides unsatisfied” (2007:2).

To further clarify this debate, Neufeldt (2007) identifies two groups with distinct approaches to development interventions: “frameworkers” and “circlers”. For “frameworkers”, there is a linear relationship between peace-building program design, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. “Circlers” on the other hand often are interested in immeasurable aspects because they seek community based processes and view available frameworks as too focused. “Circlers are interested in the uniqueness of interventions and communities – they focus on the stories and lessons that emerge from specific cultural, geographic and temporal contexts and do not expect these to be generalizable” (Neufeldt 2007:3-4). Neufeldt further argues that “circlers” often view “frameworkers” as too rigid and biased on the basis of their Western thinking. On the other hand, “frameworkers” suggest that the “circlers” way of thinking is too vague because they do not spend the time to plan and critically analyze the required outcomes and impacts of their activities (2007:4). Another tension between the groups of people is as a result of power affecting relationship, specifically within design, monitoring and evaluation processes (field note 4). It became clear during my field study that people perceived PCIA as yet another evaluating exercise to look at the impact of funding coming to those NGOs. In the development world, “frameworkers” are people working at headquarters of numerous IDAs and “circlers” are the ones either locally working for them or for partnering NGOs. “Frameworkers” are faced with a serious challenge to measure the outcome or impact of their peace-building endeavors but to achieve this; they are internally faced with another challenge in the form of resistance from “circlers”, who resist any systematic and logical framework coming from “frameworkers”. The “frameworkers” approach is predominantly adopted by IDAs or donor agencies, which leaves us with a question: what are we at risk of losing by listening to “frameworkers” and not “circlers”? However, despite the above mentioned differences between the two groups of people, there are also some dominant similarities between both constituencies as they wish to change the course of conflict to promote peace in communities they work in (Neufeldt 2007:16).

Field Note 4: In early 2007, I was invited by the SDC-Humanitarian Assistance (SDC-HA) office in Manschra, Pakistan to conduct a day-long workshop on conflict prevention. The organization felt the need for the exercise after finding no other way to resolve a dispute between the SDC-HA and its partner organizations in the earthquake affected areas of Pakistan. The conflict was based on certain rumors based on miscommunication and a contentious power relationship between the donor agency and her partners, which they identified through the exercise and dealt with by creating a team of project managers from respective NGOs and the funding agency (SDC-HA). In this case, it was a Project Manager from Switzerland who observed this conflict and felt that her fieldworkers and partner organizations needed this training.

Whenever we encountered a conflict and looked for possible causes, the study found that middlemen
(facilitators at a country level) are unsatisfied with the way policies are developed in IDAs’ headquarters as they are not consulted during the development phase and receive nothing but a document with identified priority areas of work for the next 3 to 5 years. Primarily, it is the case with most of the IDAs as they all strategize in their headquarters, physically, and most of the times are mentally miles away from realities of the identified contexts. Hereby, I would like to share the example of the World Bank, which practically directs its country offices through its headquarter in Washington from where it issues policies, procedures, and even reporting guidelines (Barbolet et al. 2005:2).

Those using PCIA in Pakistan were challenged with the term “impact” because it is not something which could be measured on a short-term basis, as most of the development projects have a timeline of no more than 5 years. So how do we measure impacts or success in short-term projects? This question is yet to be answered by PCIA. It was also explored that there is an apparent ideological or operational conflict between project administrators and those living at the project-level regarding what constitutes “success”. Such differences offer opportunities for stakeholders to consult everyone to produce joint project goals and working methodologies (Ross 2003:80).

On most occasions, the process of “risk assessment” is confused with PCIA. Risk assessment exercises in Pakistan provide opportunities for IDAs to avoid conflict(s) as the task involves exploring the links of a particular project with conflict dynamics and vice versa. Ideally and logically, all peace-building and development programs in a conflict zone should contribute to peace processes. Since not all development programs in conflict or conflict-prone zones see this as part of their job, many IDAs have developed strategies for “working in, on and around conflict” (Paffenholz et al. 2005). In the Pakistani context, it has been found that most IDAs prefer not to be directly involved in conflict transformation or peace-building process, due to their fear of insecurity or policy restrictions. Therefore, either they continue what they are doing at a lower scale (working around the conflict) or quit from that specific project area (example provided in field note 5).

Field Note 5: In the district of D.I. Khan, a conflict between the Powindahs and the Gandapurs over the issue of the Powindah’s cattle grazing in the fields of the Gandapurs occurred, which led to a fight between the two groups in which both sides lost lives. Insecurity created by the violent conflict forced the families from both sides to withdraw their children from a non-formal school of the Project for Livelihood Improvement (PLI). The PLI is supported by an IDA. Considering this scenario it is clear that to sustain this project, either the local partner organization or a funding agency needs to be aware of the situation so as to resolve the dispute in a timely manner. However, it was not the case as the PLI simply avoided the conflict and decided not to work in that area.

While working in a conflict environment, the option of conflict avoidance becomes almost impossible, especially when a particular conflict hurts or is likely to disturb the project’s performance. In some project areas, there are existing conflicts over the distribution of natural resources (land, water, forest etc.) and project design in such cases ideally has to follow the project-level conflict analysis. An example (field note 6) highlights the significance of a conflict analysis exercise at the project-level to avoid unintended negative impacts on existing socio-economic disparities due to inequitable distribution of water.

Field Note 6: Conflict analysis in D.I. Khan has led to the strategy that development organizations avoid putting their irrigation projects under the control of upper stream elites. In the past, local elites were controlling the irrigation mechanism to solely irrigate their lands, which led to a drastic increase in socio-economic gaps between the people at the upper and lower levels in irrigated areas. The rich of the upper stream became richer while the poor of the lower stream became poorer. There is a strong mistrust observed among the common people regarding water management and distribution, due to the erosion of governing institutions. The local development organizations are aware of the situation have been trying to resolve this dispute by organizing “reflect circles” between the elite and the poor, in an effort to find a mutually acceptable way to provide equal rights to water for irrigation.

It was observed that only few organizations possess the capacity to implement PCIA in conflict and conflict prone zones in collaboration with respective country offices, such as the FES and the SDC. Therefore, in 2007-08, both the FES and SDC offices in Pakistan decided to launch joint exercises on PCIA by pooling in their human and financial resources.

It is definitely a great deal of work for a single person to comprehend and implement PCIA in his/her
Development stakeholders must be clear about the fact that “PCIA is an on-going and dynamic approach taken before, during, and after a particular intervention in a conflict-prone region” (Bush 2003:6). Therefore, PCIA is supposed to be used at all stages in a project cycle. It can be used to facilitate project designing process, so that it contributes to peace-building rather than exacerbating conflicts, and to monitor ongoing projects, to make the required adjustments. Furthermore, it could also be employed to evaluate an entire project, so that lessons could be learned on how to minimize conflict risks and maximize peace-building aspects of a particular development intervention (Besançon 2005). However, quite often, PCIA is perceived outside the normal project cycle and it is hard to get PCIA integrated into an ongoing project cycle. Nevertheless, PCIA is something that is supposed to become an integral part of the project cycle, as a cross-cutting theme, in areas faced with conflict. To achieve this, it is of a paramount importance to enable PCIA-users, especially the local project staff, to firstly understand benefits of this very important framework and tool.

There is disbelief of PCIA’s utility in development projects in Pakistan. It is clear that Pakistan provides a diverse context with some visible and invisible conflicts. Considering this, a comprehensive local-level conflict analysis is a prerequisite for PCIA’s application. Even after the conflict analysis, the project developers would like to know more on what kind of projects require PCIA approach. Whenever the project staff struggles to answer this question, they fail to get into PCIA and rather look for a consultant to perform this task on their behalf. When a consultant appears on scene, he/she mostly accomplishes tasks independently and hence no transfer of knowledge takes place. Therefore, PCIA is usually not repeated again, as hiring a consultant each time is costly.

There is a more open attitude among external staff (foreigners) of IDAs in Pakistan towards PCIA, but mostly to get to know what the tool is about, rather than to obtain its practicable benefits. In some sense, these expatriates are the real project developers, as they form the bridges between the local staff and headquarters of IDAs. These foreigners naturally possess some limitations in a local context, and therefore depend on the local staff to know the basics since the local staff know local dynamics and bearing this in mind, PCIA could ideally be put into practice in consultation with local or a field staff in any IDA, as well as with in consultation with some local community people. As Bush has emphasized:

PCIA needs to be transparent, shared and people-centered. The real experts of PCIA are those women, men, girls and boys living in conflict zones. If they are not centrally involved in peace and conflict analysis and interpretation, then the exercise will fail, or worse, will disempower communities – that is, it will remove them from decisions that fundamentally affect their lives (2003:6).

However, meaningful collaboration with local partners has been limited. There are associated fears that local partners might perceive PCIA as some sort of assessment or an evaluation to cut down funding. Therefore, PCIA and related assignments have to be transparent enough to achieve the trust of local people, and reach the desired objectives.

“A rushed PCIA is a doubtful PCIA” (Bush 2003:6). PCIA does take time and under demanding circumstances of conflict-prone regions, this process has to develop its roots deeper into that context, which can be done slowly and steadily through various PCIA steps. This research found that no one (IDAs, NGOs etc.) knows how much time should be devoted for an ideal PCIA exercise. In some cases, conflict analysis took two months or so. In other cases, conflict analysis was performed simultaneously with other PCIA steps while looking at the impact of development interventions on conflict dynamics and peace processes, despite the fact that, theoretically, this is not the way it should be done. Once a project is implemented without a conflict analysis taken into consideration, it is almost impossible for the PCIA approach to prove its significance. In most cases in Pakistan, development projects were implemented without taking into consideration the local peace and conflict dynamics. The PCIA exercise was then performed partly to see their projects’ impacts on the local peace and conflict dynamics after the fact. The majority of IDAs opted for this approach to PCIA as it takes less time when all PCIA steps are merged into one assignment, and could be completed in less than a week. Most of these hurried PCIA assignments are performed on the directions of IDAs’ headquarters by the local staff in Pakistan.

Earlier, I have presented several questions from IDA staff and program implementers, which I received while talking of PCIA in Pakistan, however, there are still a couple of questions left: how can one determine if obvious changes to the peace or conflict settings are the result of a particular development intervention? What would have happened to conflict dynamics without that particular development intervention under observation? This relates to the issue of developing relevant and measurable indicators to assess the impact of a particular development intervention,
and even if indicators are perfect, there remains another dimension of attribution: when there are too many things happening in a complex environment, then how can we determine which actions bring about apparent changes (outcomes)? These are all legitimate concerns which should be addressed at the theoretical level, and informed by dialogue with the practitioners (Anderson 2000:2).

In most cases, cultural sensitivity exists in the circle of IDAs in Pakistan since they know that the lack of cultural sensitivity in some areas, mostly rural, might end up putting IDAs at conflict with local communities. For example, culturally, women from rural areas and in particular from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are not allowed to appear in front of unknown men. Therefore, NGOs working on women-related issues have to work with segregated groups of men and women. In some projects areas, specifically in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and rural areas, women cannot come alone to participate in any activity, therefore, development agencies allow a male family member to accompany a female participant, if required, and for both the travel expenses are reimbursed. This is a highly encouraging exercise in such a context, to encourage more local women in becoming a part of civil society activities. Talking of cultural understanding, there is the case of Musalihati Jirgas (Arbitration Councils). The project is intended to setup culturally acceptable mechanisms for conflict resolution. Traditionally in Northern areas of Pakistan, people have more faith on traditional mechanism of conflict resolution called ‘Jirga’. Therefore, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has established a Musalihati Jirga in each Union Council consisting of three Conciliators with a provision of one woman being its Convener.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, although the concept of PCIA receives a lot of appreciation from IDAs, especially when it appears in theoretical discussions and official documentation, the whole view takes a negative shift when it comes to the application of PCIA, where it is labeled as “irrelevant”, “complicated”, “costly”, etc. This confirms observations not only from Pakistan but also Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, South Thailand, and Indonesia. Thus, it is important to bring the information to the people working at IDAs that PCIA is about understanding conflict dynamics to avoid conflicts, as well as minimizing the unintended negative impacts resulting in or inflaming conflict, and enhancing peace-building. Here it is relevant to share a quote from Hammill and Besancon:

PCIA are not, nor do they aspire to be, the “silver bullet” for ensuring effective delivery and impact of development interventions in conflict zones. The process of assessing peace and conflict impacts of a project or program is unavoidably complex and involved, which can present challenges and shortcomings to different users. But these can be overcome, to a large extent, given enough time, flexibility and “outside of the box” thinking (2003:11).

On the basis of the findings of this paper, I would like to take the opportunity to present some recommendations to further improve the implementation of PCIA in Pakistan and similar contexts:

1. It is crucial to combine development needs assessment and baselines studies with peace and conflict analysis;
2. Anticipating and assessing the relevance of peace-building in the planning stage of a development intervention;
3. Undertaking risk assessments that anticipate the impact of the conflict on interventions (both negative and constructive types of impact);
4. It is very important to enhance the participation of all relevant stakeholders in planning, implementation and impact monitoring of development and peace-building work in conflict affected areas;
5. IDAs in Pakistan need to come up with context specific guidelines and tools on PCIA (Hoffman 2003:27) and to achieve this objective, it will be much more realistic and workable if all stakeholders (developers, IDAs, partners organizations/recipients) are involved in the process (Hoffman 2003:34-35);
6. There is a need to introduce a culture of conflict-and-peace-focused monitoring and evaluation into program and policy implementation by supporting self-evaluations and organizational change for mainstreaming (Paffenholz et al. 2005); and
7. It has been explored that few IDAs in Pakistan work in collaboration with each other, even while striving for similar outcomes in a particular project context. Individually, most of IDAs don’t have enough human and financial resources to benefit from PCIA and therefore, it is recommended that IDAs in the country develop a common platform to pool in their resources for PCIA related exercises.

IDAs working in Pakistan and similar contexts, where social change takes a long time due to peoples’ strong roots in the local traditions, need to understand that the desired “change” cannot be as sudden as the transaction of aid. It takes time and requires patience and consistency. Pakistan is not homogenous and it embodies significant ethnic and religious disparities, with the majority still deeply rooted into old traditions. Therefore, it is not an easy task for IDAs to work in Pakistan. Still, the country needs IDAs to support local initiatives to address numerous
socio-economic and political problems. And such desired international interventions could be improved with the help of comprehensive and contextually relevant understanding of conflicts.

I would like to reemphasize that PCIA is not about being sensitive only to traditional forms of conflict and violence but also to non-traditional insecurities associated with socio-economic disparities, gender inequalities and various other forms of discriminations leading to or having potential to turn into violent conflicts. To conclude, the following thought provoking expression of Helen Keller is very appropriate:

I do not want the peace which passeth understanding.
I want the understanding which bringeth peace.

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**Footnotes**

[1] Daniel Pearl, an American journalist with the *Wall Street Journal*, was kidnapped and murdered in Karachi in February 2002.

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**About the Author**

The author has seven years of experience of working with various development organizations in Pakistan. He obtained his MA degree in Peace Education from the UN mandated University for Peace in Costa Rica and MA in Sociology from the University of Agri. Faisalabad, Pakistan. Presently, he is a PhD candidate in the department of political and international studies at the University of New England, Australia.