



**HEKS
EPER**
Bread for all.

Conflict Sensitivity Approach

HEKS/EPER Global Cooperation's strategy, promising practices, achievements and perspectives on its conflict sensitivity approach.

Why Conflict Sensitivity Matters

Global Challenges

Conflict is a relationship between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who have, or think they have, **incompatible goals, values, interests, or claims** to status, power, or scarce resources. **Conflicts are a fact of life, inevitable, and often creative.** In any setting where international actors operate, their actions and behaviour may generate conflicts or positively or negatively affect **existing conflicts that influence their programmes.** Conflict sensitivity (CS) frameworks and methodologies for considering the impacts of development interventions on conflict contexts originated in the late-90s. Since then, there have been tremendous efforts by development organisations, donor agencies, multi-lateral organisations and corporations to train staff and design policies and programs incorporating conflict sensitivity. Conflict sensitivity has proven to be a vital tool for operating in fragile contexts. It supports the analysis and program review for all types of intervention, from humanitarian response to development and peacebuilding programmes.

Conflict Sensitivity is the ability of an organisation to ...

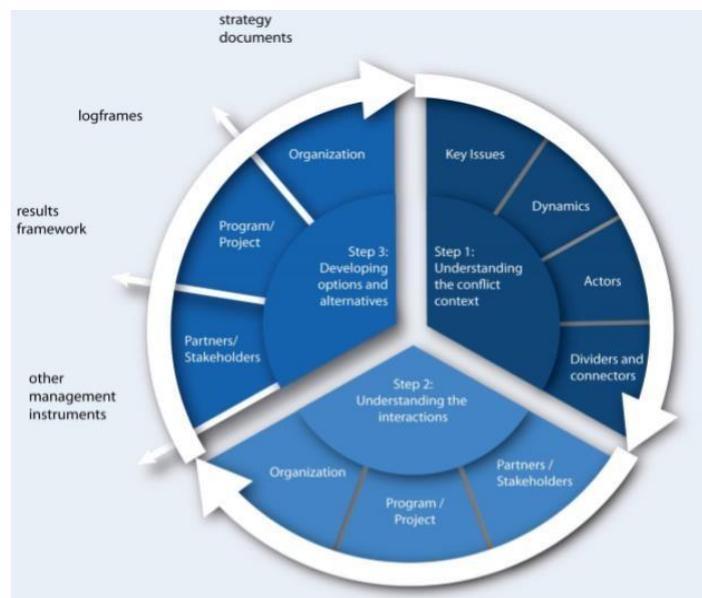
... understand the local and broader context (incl. key issues, dynamics, actors, dividers and connectors) it operates in. Understanding the interaction between its intervention and the context. act upon this understanding to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on conflict.

How HEKS/EPER responds

To stay engaged effectively, avoid harming by creating or exacerbating tensions and conflicts, and strengthen opportunities for peace through its intervention, HEKS/EPER mainstreams conflict sensitivity as a cross-cutting issue in all projects and programmes and at an institutional level. It is applied in the 4 outcomes of the HEKS/EPER international programme as well as in the three operative HEKS/EPER sections of development cooperation, humanitarian aid and church cooperation. HEKS/EPER works with the 3-step model of conflict sensitivity, which KOFF/Swisspeace developed (see *definition of conflict sensitivity in the box above and the 3-step model in the figure on the right*). Conflict sensitivity applies to all contexts since conflict is an inherent part of social life and can be found everywhere. Its systematic application is particularly important in contexts considered fragile and affected by a violent conflict.

Through its interventions and international presence, HEKS/EPER is part of the local contexts and has intended and unintended effects on these. In doing so, the organisation must **prevent and/or mitigate negative effects.** Beyond that, a systematically applied conflict-sensitive approach leads to more context-specific interventions and better chances to **meaningfully and sustainably support women and men** in their context.

More than a variety of analysis tools: In brief, conflict sensitivity is looking at how we work, what we are doing, and whether this contributes to conflict prevention, social cohesion and peacebuilding. The concept of conflict sensitivity comes with various tools (like conflict analysis, stakeholder mapping, analysis of intergroup tensions and 'dividers' as well as 'connectors' with the potential to mitigate a conflict, etc.). However, HEKS/EPER understands conflict sensitivity not only as a set of working tools but as a cross-cutting issue that aims to include



3-steps-model of conflict sensitivity developed by KOFF/Swisspeace.

appropriate attitudes and expertise into the organisation's culture, structure and processes – this applies to HEKS/EPER and its partner organisations.

Main networks and partners: HEKS/EPER is an active member of the global [Conflict Sensitivity Community \(CSC\) Hub](#) and, as such, participates in international discussions, joint learning, evidence-building and networking in the field of conflict sensitivity. Moreover, HEKS/EPER is part of a working group of the CSC Hub to plan joint training regarding conflict sensitivity.

Conflict sensitivity within HEKS/EPER

HEKS/EPER strives to understand the context and its interaction with implementing organisations and the programmes or projects. It aims to act upon that understanding to avoid unintentionally feeding into further division, and to maximise the potential contribution to strengthening social cohesion and peace.



Bangladesh: Working with communities, relevant networks and competent partners helps to implement projects without doing harm.

Conflict sensitivity in HEKS/EPER programmes and projects

A conflict-sensitive participatory context analysis is conducted for each new HEKS/EPER development cooperation country programme. At the project level, such assessments are mandatory at the beginning of a new or major development cooperation project. The assessment contains detailed information about the context, including other topics, the relevant key issues, dynamics, actors, dividers and connectors. Still, it also assesses the interaction between the context and the planned project. It elaborates recommendations on adapting the project, the partnerships or the institutional setting to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on conflict, social cohesion and peacebuilding.

Our experiences with regular conflict sensitivity assessments show that they may substantially enhance participation, inclusion, transparency, accountability, gender sensitivity and non-discrimination in HEKS/EPER projects.

Conflict sensitivity being effective means it needs to be integrated into the full project and programme cycle. As the context and action evolve, it is important that changes are constantly observed, assessed and measures are taken the conflict-sensitive time monitoring and evaluation.

Examples of Conflict Sensitivity key issues

- Understanding roles and relationships of local actors.
- Transparent and conflict sensitive selection project participants.
- Sensitive handling of power and control over the distribution of project resources.
- Well-balanced and competent staffing of HEKS/EPER and partner organizations.
- Avoid implicit ethical messages (behavior of HEKS/EPER and partner staff) that create or exacerbate conflict.

Promising Practices Worldwide

Uganda – Strengthening peaceful co-existence among host and refugee communities

Bidi Bidi in West Nile is home to approximately 190,935 (UNHCR Feb 2023) refugees (36,609 households) who fled the civil conflict in South Sudan (2016), making it one of the largest refugee settlements in the world. Key drivers of conflict in the settlements are access to resources, especially public services, local infrastructure, land, firewood and water. Tension and division mostly surface while accessing natural resources, such as water points, firewood collection points, and cultivable land. During the first year after their arrival, refugees reported being discriminated against and charged higher prices, such as setting up a business. Moreover, a **HEKS/EPER conflict analysis** of the refugee settlements in northern Uganda found that tensions and conflicts existed within refugee communities along tribal lines. The analysis revealed deep hatred among certain groups in the settlements which host Nuer and Dinka tribes, for instance, and that hatred and division have been imported from South Sudan.

With this situation, HEKS/EPER and its local non-profit partner CEFORD (Community Empowerment for Rural Development) are implementing a **project to ‘Strengthened Livelihoods and Peaceful Co-existence of Host and Refugee Community Households in Bidibidi Settlement, West Nile, Uganda’** between June 2020 and May 2024. In line with the Ugandan Refugee Response Plan (2019-2024), this project responds directly to the livelihood and conflict transformation needs of South Sudanese refugees and Ugandan host communities in the Bidibidi refugee settlement located in Yumbe District.

It builds on existing interventions in Bidibidi by CEFORD and HEKS/EPER to enable refugees and host communities to live in peaceful coexistence and to collaborate to increase their production capacity and improve access to markets so that they may increase their household incomes, generate local market opportunities and vitalise local economies. Mixed farmer’s groups have been formed, including members from the host community and refugees from different tribes, and supported with the aim that they become autonomous, sustainable and able to manage the whole value chain of selected products systemically. Agroecological and resilient production, including open-pollinated seed varieties, ownership, and financial sustainability, is being promoted. Capacity building of farmer groups is designed to help establish market linkages and promote strong and transparent partnerships with private sector actors. As a process for building peace and harmony, this intervention promotes **local solutions by building the project participants’ knowledge, skills and capacities to respond to peace-building processes based on traditional conflict transformation mechanisms. Including duty-bearers and rights-holders** are being promoted at all levels, and right-holders have been trained to advocate for their rights. All activities are designed based on local needs and service gaps and on community consultation and participation to ensure sustainability and appropriate intervention use and avoid disempowering local structures and processes. The project is designed to support and build local capacity for its participants, key community stakeholders, local administration, and local services and systems to ensure sustainable impacts.



Uganda: Local farmers are supported to improve the management of value chains for better income..

Even though COVID-19 has brought additional challenges to the project, forcing the project, e.g., to suspend group activities for a long period, so far, the intervention proved to be effective.

All the targeted 900 households increased their production from 180 to 773.755 acres. With the increase in acreage, yield is expected to increase and, consequently, household income. Thanks to the intense training sessions on topics such as climate resilience, farming as a business, and good agronomic practice, the provision of micro-grants and market-linking efforts, positive results in terms of increased income, production and productivity are expected among the targeted farmer’s groups.

In 2021, the mitigation and transformation of conflicts related to access to land, resources and services through community-based mechanisms and alternative dispute and resolution mechanisms have been improved. This change is owed to the sensitisation efforts on peaceful coexistence conducted through community meetings, the formation of mixed farmer groups, community dialogues, and radio talk shows by key opinion leaders promoting understanding among refugees and host community about their rights, responsibilities and opportunities for building livelihoods as a result of strengthened social integration. People from different groups are now increasingly seen working together and sharing resources for production and productivity enhancement. As a result, 568 refugees registered within the farmer groups (out of a total of 900 individuals) could access land offered by host communities at no cost in a context where the practice within the settlement areas has been to lease land to refugees. Joint monitoring by the different stakeholders has provided another window of opportunity for joint learning, sharing experience, social cohesion and, ultimately, rural development.

Romania – Applying a triple nexus approach in responding to the displacement crisis caused by the war in Ukraine.

When the first refugees from Ukraine arrived in Romania after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which started on 24 February 2022, HEKS/EPER had been active in Romania through Church Cooperation and Development Cooperation projects and recently started managing humanitarian projects funded by ECHO in other countries. HEKS/EPER's and its partners' existing expertise in Romania and globally allowed us to launch an immediate humanitarian response while continuing to work on the ongoing Development and Church Cooperation portfolio. When people fleeing Ukraine started entering Romania, there was an immediate need for humanitarian aid to ensure that their basic needs could be covered. A few days later, HEKS/EPER's partners were already providing aid at the border and in other parts of Romania and Western Ukraine.

HEKS/EPER's humanitarian response is paired with a peacebuilding lens and has gradually integrated efforts closer to a development approach. In terms of peacebuilding, HEKS/EPER aims at the following:

- preventing people from lacking the necessary protection,
- preventing the creation or exacerbation of conflicts through its action, and
- strengthening social cohesion.

Particular attention has been paid to quality and accountability to avoid creating or exacerbating tensions. The definition, use and communication of adequate criteria for selecting people benefitting from HEKS/EPER's support have been understood as a key element. Setting up and assuring the proper functioning of a feedback and complaint response mechanism (FCRM) has allowed people to express reasons for their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the organisation's work. A funding partnership with Christian Aid offered the opportunity to get hands-on support for setting up an FCRM building on both organisations' existing tools and experience. In that process, particular attention has been paid to the available capacity to assure effective responses to complaints can be provided at any time. Another conflict-sensitive measure was hiring Ukrainian refugees by HEKS/EPER and its partners. This proved to be particularly important and helpful in overcoming language barriers and made actions more effective as the hired refugees had a strong ability to understand people's needs.

After covering basic needs throughout the first months, HEKS/EPER extended its response by supporting **refugees in their economic inclusion** with funding from UNHCR. This effort aims at **helping Ukrainians earn an income, reduce their dependence on aid and strengthen social cohesion in Romania**. Constant monitoring of the Romanian host communities' situation has concluded that **directing aid towards host communities is not a priority**. In Romania, host families have received financial support from the government, which contrasts with the situation in Moldova, where humanitarian aid targets host communities without specific government support. In early 2023, there were rumours about possible changes to the support from the Romanian government. HEKS/EPER will carefully monitor the situation to evaluate whether any adaptation is needed in its approach continuously. The unpredictability of the further development of the war and displacement crisis is another issue making **continuous conflict-sensitive context monitoring and lesson learning a must** to be prepared for different scenarios. In 2023, HEKS/EPER plans to further develop its response in Romania along the triple nexus. The development aspects will be strengthened through a continued effort in job counselling for Ukrainians willing to

find a job or build their own business, as well as the implementation of the survival and community community-lede approach (sclr), which empowers Ukrainian self-help groups through micro-grants giving them the agency to decide themselves what type of project they want to set up and implement on their own. At the same time, continued preparedness for emergency support for basic needs in case of high numbers of new arrivals of refugees and upholding the conflict-sensitive approach remain crucial.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – Gaining access to hard-to-reach areas in North Kivu and implementing humanitarian aid with development and peacebuilding benefits

The targeted areas of the Bwito, Bashali/Mokoto, Wanianga, Bamate and Batangi chiefdoms in the DRC, where HEKS/EPER implements its **humanitarian response**, are **at the heart of ongoing ethnic conflicts** because they are located on the main mineral transportation routes. The remote conflict-affected areas of eastern DRC are characterised by their inaccessibility, which locks up and marginalises thousands of households, depriving them of access to healthcare, education and economic opportunities. Moreover, these conditions prevent humanitarian organisations from intervening and responding to the urgent needs of the population. In the field, HEKS/EPER teams observe daily that **access, a vector of development, is a priority need of communities**.

Among its various sectors of intervention, HEKS/EPER implements a **road rehabilitation programme** – financed by USAID, the SDC and the organisation's funds – which reconnects areas and populations. To do this, several thousand beneficiaries, selected according to pre-established criteria and presented transparently to the communities, take turns in **Cash for Work** activities to rehabilitate the roads that connect their localities. Implementing these tasks creates employment opportunities for vulnerable populations with limited or no access to economic opportunities. Building on the principles of a **triple nexus approach**, the programme covers **marginalised people's basic needs and their development and peacebuilding perspectives**.

Increased trade

The development of sustainable road infrastructure ensures the supply of equipment, materials and food to the targeted communities and the flow of their local production to markets. Indeed, the intensification of trade allows the transport of more goods that cannot be found in the area, such as manufactured goods or commodities. This phenomenon contributes to falling prices and consequently relieves the most vulnerable households. In addition, the rehabilitation of the roads allows production to be transported to the main centres (Goma, Rutshuru, Butembo, etc.), strengthening the situation of producer households, farmers and fish farmers, and farmer organisations. Ultimately, all these elements contribute to the economic development of the area.

Improvement of the security situation

HEKS/EPER's approach contributes to easing inter-ethnic tensions while strengthening social cohesion between communities because, united and committed to the same objective, the beneficiaries from different villages and

Building relationships with duty-bearers and conflict parties to secure access to people in need

HEKS/EPER pays particular attention to the fact that people in hard-to-reach areas are often more affected by a crisis but receive less aid than those in more easily accessible locations. Working in such an environment where war, conflict or sometimes multiple crises are ongoing requires very different arrangements regarding security management, logistics, and conflict-sensitive programming.

HEKS/EPER closely assesses conflict and crisis-affected areas and its options to reach those people who are cut off from other support and services. HEKS/EPER deploys highly experienced staff, security policies are constantly improved, and a security focal point is active in the different security networks.



Working in hard-to-reach areas requires **discussions with all relevant actors, including conflict parties**, to allow for the implementation of interventions while ensuring safety

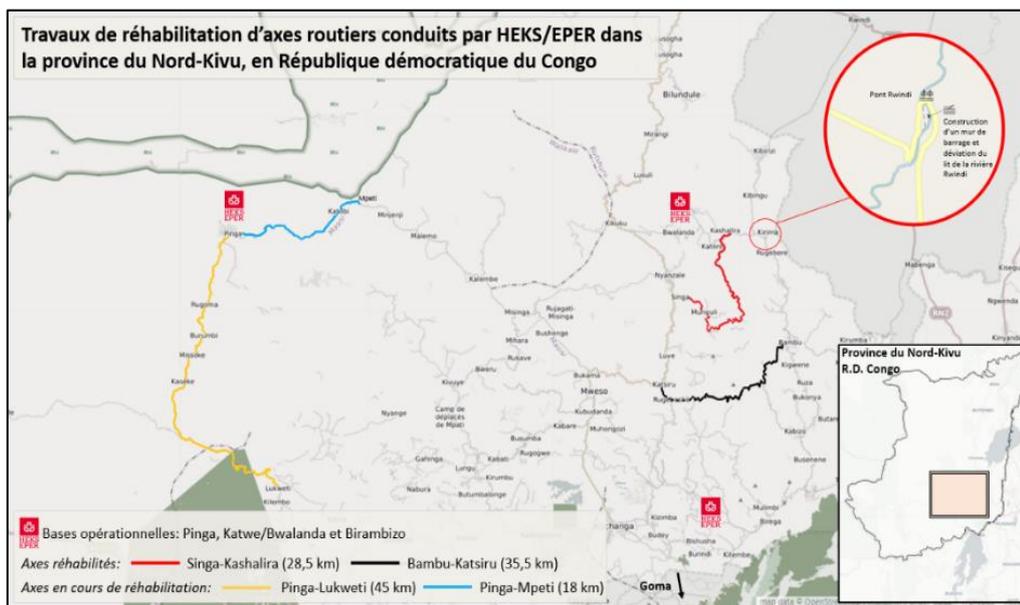
ethnic origins **learn to live together and develop a spirit of mutual support**. In September 2019, for example, at the end of an ethnic conflict in the heart of Bwito, the populations of the villages of Kahumiro, where many Hutus had moved, and Kibirizi, populated by Hunde and Nande, showed a strong feeling of hatred towards each other. To illustrate this, in August of that year, a displaced Hutu from Kahumiro tried to return to his home in Kibirizi and was killed. By associating the different communities around the Kahumiro – Kibirizi axis rehabilitation, HEKS/EPER has enabled the communities to unite, create solidarity links and return to commercial exchanges. At the end of the project, the return of Hutus from Kibirizi, who had moved to Kahumiro, could be observed.

In addition, the pacification of these areas encourages the fled populations to return to their villages and to repopulate an axis benefitting from improved security: the rehabilitated roads present less risk of robbery because of the fluidity they allow. **To take advantage of the increased safety and the gradual resumption of traffic due to road rehabilitation, entire villages are relocating to settle along the road**. For example, one village decided to settle along the Pinga-Lukweti road when they heard that it was going to be rehabilitated by HEKS/EPER. The enhanced infrastructure also allows households to see their **children attend school, facing fewer risks**. Finally, creating economic opportunities reduces the risk of recruitment into armed groups and contributes de facto to improving security in the area.

Conflict sensitive implementation

In the implementation of its activities, HEKS/EPER gives the utmost importance to **respecting humanitarian principles** and **ensures the maximum participation of the target populations** in all stages of implementation. HEKS/EPER's humanitarian assistance relies mainly on its high level of community acceptance, which is a prerequisite for carrying out activities in marginalised areas characterized by an unstable security context. HEKS/EPER pays the greatest attention to the **equitable distribution of aid** but also to the **ethnic composition of its teams**. The ambition remains to facilitate communication between ethnic groups. To this end, HEKS/EPER regularly organises meetings with the different community leaders - who were no longer speaking to each other - to explain its projects and its approach.

Increased humanitarian response



DRC: Map of road rehabilitation work carried out by HEKS/EPER in North Kivu.

These achievements enable assisting the most vulnerable populations thanks to aid delivery while simultaneously intensifying and boosting the activities carried out under previous projects. Thus, rehabilitating the axes increases the possibilities since it establishes interventions in other sectors (WASH, health, food security, protection, etc.) and promotes access to basic social

services. The synergies created by the complementarity of activities and intervention sectors improve living conditions and encourage displaced populations to return to their locality of origin. For example, the NGO has implemented WASH and agricultural revival activities on the Singa-Kashalira axis rehabilitated by HEKS/EPER.

Achievements & Perspectives

Achievements 2022

Since 2017, HEKS/EPER staff in the partner countries and Switzerland have elaborated individual conflict sensitivity action plans that include concrete measures to increase conflict sensitivity in their daily work. Moreover, conflict sensitivity assessments are carried out for all new country programme phases and all new and major projects. In these conflict sensitivity assessments, the local staff of HEKS/EPER and its partner organisations, project participants, and important stakeholders are involved. Due to these analyses and capacity-building processes, **the awareness of conflict-sensitive programme management and planning has increased noticeably**, which helped HEKS/EPER not to exacerbate existing tensions but strengthen opportunities for peace through its interventions.



CS trainings to enable communities and partners to act conflict sensitive.

Alone in 2022, HEKS/EPER and its partners faced a **diverse array of conflicts**:

- Latent and violent, partly armed conflicts
- Civil unrest
- Conflicts over land, territory, and natural resources
- Community conflicts
- Conflicts between farmers or farmers and herders
- Discrimination of vulnerable and marginalised groups
- Conflicts linked to COVID-19 related measures, etc

Volatile contexts lead to an erosion of the social fabric of affected communities, making it pivotal for humanitarian interventions to consider the causes of tensions between communities such as **host and IDP communities**, who usually compete for already scarce resources. **Addressing the needs of both communities and involving them equally in the design and implementation of responses has helped HEKS/EPER reduce sources of tensions** in many different contexts, such as in Uganda, Moldova and Bangladesh.

In 2022, the Association poured la Promotion des Initiatives Locales (APIL), in collaboration with HEKS/EPER Senegal, conducted a conflict analysis in the project's intervention zone (Saloum Delta) as part of the implementation of the VIMASA 3 project.

The VIMASA 3 project team carried out the data collection in coordination with the Buco team from October 25 to 26, 2022. The study took place in the districts of Toubacouta and Fimela but saw the participation of actors involved in the management of the resources of the two marine protected areas of Bamaboung and Gandoule.

Although the project intervention area does not experience violent conflicts, political and social tensions are common.

The most important dynamics that emerged from the analysis include conflicts between farmers and herders, conflicts related to land tenure, and the illegal exploitation of certain natural resources, leading to conflictual tensions between the populations and the technical services in charge of enforcing the regulations.

The analysis showed that most conflicts are inherent in failures in the governance of natural resources entrusted to the territorial communities, under the control of the technical services and administrative authorities, but also in need of knowledge or non-application of the rules in force by the populations. The existence of traditional mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of conflicts is a crucial opportunity the project should rely on to prevent the outbreak of latent conflicts and promote the peaceful coexistence of actors in the project environment.

Perspectives

It remains challenging for HEKS/EPER and other development actors to systematically describe or even measure the progress of the mainstreaming process to provide evidence about the progress of conflict-sensitive programme management. In the coming years, HEKS/EPER will put special emphasis on the following challenges:

- Improving and systematising **human rights-based, conflict- and gender-sensitive context analysis** at the beginning of each new project or programme (phase).

- Strengthen **safeguarding procedures and accountability** in the organisation, e.g., through complaint mechanisms in all programmes.
- Further progress on **decentralising competencies** within HEKS/EPER and **localising our aid**.
- Enhancing the implementation of a **humanitarian-development-peacebuilding triple nexus** to provide coordinated and comprehensive solutions to local problems.
- Transparent and conflict-sensitive **selection of partner organisations and project participants**, as well as conflict-sensitive **handling of power/control over the distribution of project resources**.
- Well-balanced and competent staffing of HEKS/EPER and partner organisations, including avoidance of implicit **ethical messages** (acting of HEKS/EPER and partner staff) that create or exacerbate conflict.

Other HEKS/EPER publications related to 'conflict sensitivity'

- KOFF/Swisspeace, HEKS/EPER and other Swiss NGOs. (2015). Online Course Conflict Sensitivity. In English, French and Spanish. Access via HEKS/EPER conflict transformation advisors or KOFF/Swisspeace.
- Conflict Sensitivity Consortium. (2012). How to guide to conflict sensitivity. London: The Conflict Sensitivity Consortium.
- cfd (ed.) (2004). Gender and conflict sensitive program management. Focus on Gender and Peacebuilding.
- Handschin, Abitbol and Alluri. (2016). Working Paper Conflict Sensitivity: Taking it to the Next Level. Available at: https://www.swisspeace.ch/assets/publications/downloads/Working-Papers/950ee9877e/Conflict-Sensitivity-Taking-it-to-the-Next-Level-Working-Paper-16-swisspeace-sabina_handschin-eric_abitol-rina_alluri.pdf

Strategies, policies, guidelines, and reports published on ID's Governance Website: https://en.heks.ch/Institutional_Governance

This is HEKS/EPER



HEKS/EPER is the aid organisation of the Swiss protestant churches. It operates towards a more equitable and peaceful world (and Switzerland) with resilient communities, focusing on four topics: **Climate Justice, Inclusion, Right to Land & Food, and Refuge & Migration.**

In 2022, HEKS/EPER supported more than 60 projects in Switzerland, the inclusion of 98'000 people, and with 232 projects in 30 countries, 2.5 million people directly in economic, social or humanitarian need. The operating income of the whole organisation has risen to 114 M CHF and expenditure to 108.13 M CHF – of which 54.54 M CHF were net costs spent for the international programme.

In the Global Cooperation division, HEKS/EPER ameliorated with 17.8 M CHF (net costs) spent on 96 **development projects** for the life of 946'267 people focusing on access to land and resources, securing basic services, fostering sustainable production and inclusive market systems. It also promoted the social inclusion of marginalised, inclusive governance structures and conflict transformation. 23.4 M benefitted indirectly – e.g., through successful advocacy for new rights or policies (e.g., right to land, water, education, health, market access).

HEKS/EPER's **humanitarian aid** spent more than 29 M CHF (net costs) in 72 projects in 18 countries, directly reaching 1.522 M people affected by conflicts and disasters; another 2.4 M were indirectly reached with health prevention campaigns or rebuilt public sanitation, road or health infrastructures.

In the frame of **Church Cooperation**, HEKS/EPER enabled with 2.26 M CHF social work of Reformed Churches in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, reaching out to almost 35'000 people through 29 projects; another 30'500 were reached indirectly.

HEKS/EPER sensitises the needs and rights of people and communities worldwide, addressing causes of global inequalities. To **influence the public, media, politics and other stakeholders in Switzerland** to achieve a transition to a more equitable, peaceful world, preserving the limited natural resources, HEKS/EPER spent 4.5 M CHF on advocacy and policy work.

HEKS/EPER Global Cooperation strives towards systemic change with its human rights-based approach, promoting ownership, innovation, and the nexus between humanitarian aid and development activities. Together with competent partners and well-interconnected alliances, HEKS/EPER fosters constant dialogue between civil society, the private sector, and Government actors enabling people and communities to advocate for their needs and rights. The international divisions' conflict- and gender-sensitive programming is risk-informed and evidence-based. A proficient institutional governance framework allows effectiveness and transparency.

In Switzerland, HEKS/EPER supported with 34.2 M CHF net costs of more than 60 projects in 15 cantons disadvantaged people in becoming socially and economically integrated by promoting equal opportunity and assisting jobless people, refugees, and other individuals by providing day structures, legal advice, vocational training, language courses, dialogue platforms, etc.

The nine core values of HEKS/EPER: Justice / Self-Determination / Participation / Respect / Solidarity / Support without Borders / Close to People / Effectiveness, / Accountability.

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Published by HEKS/EPER thematic advisory and MEAL units, May 2023, Zürich (Switzerland)

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