Working in, on, or around conflict? Concern Worldwide's conflict management in Port au Prince, Haiti

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Executive summary

This report documents Concern Worldwide's experiences in managing conflict in the slums of Port au Prince Haiti and develops lessons that Concern and other NGOs might apply to addressing conflict other contexts. As an international non-governmental humanitarian organisation committed to eliminating extreme poverty, Concern Worldwide works in some of the most insecure places around the world. From Somalia to Afghanistan, conflict represents a risk to staff, to organisation, and to beneficiaries. While Concern has considerable expertise in managing staff and organisational security, and references conflict management in its strategic plans (including its Disaster Risk Reduction policy and its 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, which includes the strategic goal of building "conflict management competency at programme and policy level"), it has yet to engage heavily in conflict management at programming level. Concern's work in two slums in Port au Prince, Haiti — St. Martin and Martissant — is an exception: Concern has directly engaged in conflict reduction activities since 2006, with broadly positive response. Reviewing Concern's activities in these slums might thus be useful for shedding light on how to Concern might manage conflict in the future.

The report starts by discussing the origin and impacts of gang violence in Port au Prince and the approach Concern outlines for managing conflict. Concern understands conflict as a hazard that can be addressed through disaster risk reduction (DRR), so the report next identifies and reviews three general conflict management techniques and their relationship with DRR: working *in* conflict with peacebuilding, working *on* conflict with conflict sensitivity, and working *around* conflict by managing security. The main body of the report reviews how Concern has worked in, on, and around conflict in Haiti in its 2006-2012 peacebuilding work in St. Martin and Martissant, its 2012-present conflict sensitive programme in Martissant, and its crosscutting security strategies and practices. The report concludes with recommendations on how Concern can incorporate conflict programming within Haiti and across the organisation.

Concern started working on conflict in St. Martin and Martissant after it realised that entrenched, politicised, and violent gang warfare was contributing to poverty and vulnerability to the extent that the organisation could not fulfil its mandate of addressing extreme poverty. It engaged in numerous practices over the years in attempts to alleviate conflict and reduce extreme poverty, mostly centred on participatory dialogue and facilitation coupled with small scale economic and natural hazard management activities. Concern has been able to reduce some of the conflict through these interventions, but conflict remains an issue in the slums, fuelled by economic and social disparity and higher level political forces.

In Haiti, a conflict sensitive approach that utilizes proper conflict assessment and management techniques including participatory dialogue can, at a minimum, ensure that the organisation does not make conflict worse, and, at a maximum, create an environment where conflict transformation is possible and peacebuilding can help transform the roots of conflict by addressing it directly. Since Concern views conflict as a specific hazard within a broader DRR framework, including conflict sensitivity as a DRR practice could be useful for mainstreaming conflict management across programmes.

The conflict in Haiti is a complex outcome of the decisions of local, regional, and national actors and has political, social, and economic dynamics. Many stakeholders described how economic marginalisation spurred on gang violence, and linked that marginalisation to political and social marginalisation. Conflict cannot be addressed in isolation but requires engaging in these dynamics across levels. Incorporating conflict as part of a multi-level integrated programming approach could help tackle conflict in a holistic manner. The complexity and dynamism of conflict in Port au Prince also makes it difficult to completely plan for conflict interventions. Resilience perspectives operate from an overt position of complexity and emphasise the need to adapt, learn, and prepare for inevitable disruptions and changes in outcomes as well as approach interventions from a multi-level and multi-sectoral manner. Approaching conflict from a resilience perspective may be useful for Concern's conflict management work.

Concern is well positioned to better integrate conflict management into its programming through a combination of conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding. Given that many of the poorest and most marginalised are often affected by conflict, better conflict management could improve Concern's ability to address the hazards associated with extreme poverty. However, conflict management takes a specific set of skills and techniques such as dialogue and facilitation approaches. In Haiti, Concern partnered with the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, an NGO with deep expertise in conflict management, to assist in its work. Concern could either work to build its internal capacity for conflict management or could partner with Glencree or similar organisations for implementing conflict programming. Concern's conflict management activities in Haiti cannot be applied as a blueprint to other contexts, as conflict dynamics can be drastically different depending on the type of conflict and other institutional factors. For instance, peacebuilding might compromise perceptions of neutrality and negatively impact humanitarian space when conflicts are highly politicised. Additionally, while Concern has begun to develop a strategic position on conflict at organisational level and a common conflict lexicon, it still needs to further integrate conflict management across the organisation. Additional steps could include modifying DRR tools toward greater conflict focus and developing a conflict management strategy; identify key actors within the organisation that could promote conflict work; partnering with other organisations with conflict expertise; and gradually building human resources in conflict.