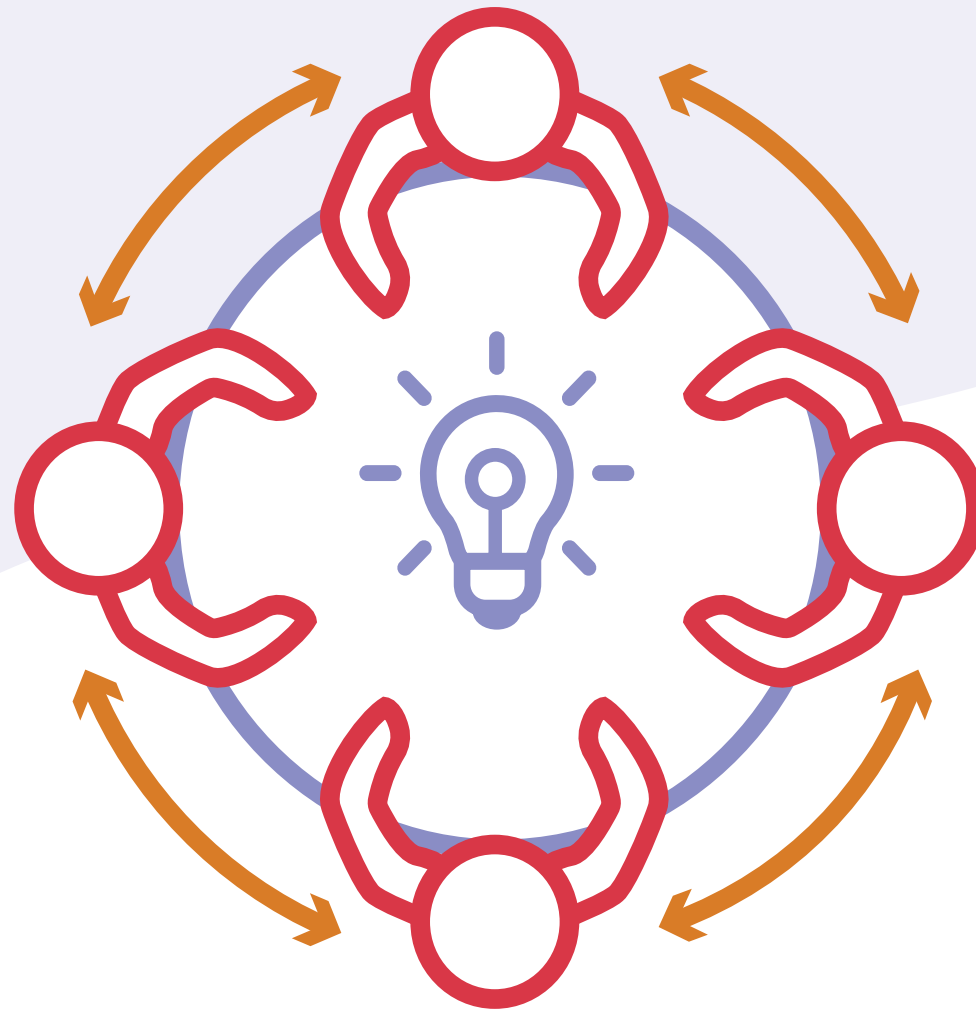


WHEN DISASTER MEETS CONFLICT

Think-Table Toolkit

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Introduction

Every year, 30 percent of all disasters occurring around the world strike conflict-affected countries. Disaster responses exist in different types of conflict scenarios: high-intensity, low-intensity and post-conflict.

The International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) research project, [When Disaster Meets Conflict](#), is based on nine country case studies that explore the challenges, experiences, best practices and success factors for humanitarian aid in each of the three conflict settings.

‘Think-Tables’ are exploratory discussions with the aim of creating actionable ideas. We have developed this Think-Table Toolkit to help humanitarian practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders to run their own Think-Table to translate ISS’s research into action-oriented recommendations with real-world application for humanitarian actors.

The following videos provide further information on the ISS research and will help inform your own Think-Table:

[When Disaster Meets Conflict \(Animation\)](#)

[When Disaster Meets Conflict \(Trailer\)](#)

Getting Started

Themes

Three themes provide common ground to start a discussion on the challenges and opportunities around disaster response and humanitarian aid in different types of conflict settings:

1. Access to minorities and/or remote areas—a common problem in disaster response where aid is not allocated on the basis of need, but on the basis of feasibility (determined by logistics, violent unrest, or governmental power over aid supplies)
2. Intervention design—implementing issues including political pressures on parties involved in decision-making processes, including ‘localisation’ of humanitarian aid and the interplay of national and international actors when designing a response project
3. Safety and security for communities and operations—safety and security for both local and international non-state actors, raising questions around disaster response and its effectiveness in unsafe regions.

Lead questions

Lead questions should spark the participants’ thought process:

- Why are lessons not applied and what are the blockers?
- What steps are necessary in order to overcome some of the issues around access, intervention design and/or safety and security?

Case studies

Participants are asked to reflect on their own experiences and expertise to elicit new avenues of real-life application.

Case Study One

Afghanistan: Disaster response in a high-intensity conflict (HIC) scenario

Research brief

Afghanistan is considered an extremely disaster-prone country due to its high levels of conflict and its exposure to multiple social, political and ecological hazards. As such, the country comes with a multi-hazard landscape that poses several challenges to disaster risk reduction (DRR).

Key findings

Challenges when working in different levels of conflict:

- DRR activities are isolated from institutional set-up making international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) the driving force for DRR projects and strategies
- Conflict impedes DRR at all levels, while DRR can create or exacerbate conflict at the community level, although some recent DRR projects have sought to address conflict
- DRR faces a wide range of operational issues, meaning projects that work in or on conflict require lengthy preparation and implementation time.

Guiding questions for Think-Table discussion

1. Which issues of safety and security for communities and operations arise when working in, on, or around high-intensity conflict scenarios?
2. If and how can disaster response be upheld when dealing with unsafe regions?

Think-Table Theme

Safety and Security for communities and operations

Reading material

Afghanistan: Disaster Risk Reduction in a high-conflict setting by Rodrigo Mena

www.iss.nl/sites/corporate/files/2019-11/disaster-risk-reduction-in-a-high-conflict-setting_rb-afghanistan.pdf

Case Study Two

Myanmar: Disaster response in low-intensity conflict (LIC) scenario

Research brief

Myanmar is highly prone to natural hazards, such as floods, landslides, earthquakes, tsunamis, and cyclones, such as 2015's Cyclone Komen. The situation was aggravated by increasingly volatile intercommunal tensions, a government system in partial democratic transition, and a humanitarian system in overhaul. This caused controversial issues on getting relief to marginalised minorities in the ethnic states of Chin and Rakhine.

Key findings

Working with minorities in disaster response remains a highly contested terrain:

- Minorities were more vulnerable and had limited coping capacity. The government response was directly or indirectly discriminatory
- Civil society organisations (CSOs) were instrumental in providing relief to members of the Chin minority, but largely refrained from helping Muslims in Rakhine, because of bias, restrictions or fear of stigmatisation
- International humanitarian agencies relied on a multitude of strategies to attempt and support Muslims without escalating tensions, but with mixed success.

Guiding questions for Think-Table discussion

1. What are primary blockers in the humanitarian system when dealing with low-conflict scenarios?
2. Who is given access in these circumstances—local actors vs. international actors?

Think-Table Theme

Access to minorities and/or remote areas

Reading material

Myanmar: The controversial issue of minorities in responding to cyclone Komen in 2015 by Isabelle Desportes
www.iss.nl/en/media/2019-04-cyclone-komen-response-myanmar

Case Study Three

Disaster response in post-conflict scenario: Sierra Leone

Research brief

In 2017, mudslide and floods struck Sierra Leone, a country that was still recovering from the Ebola crisis and a prolonged civil war. Additionally, Sierra Leone experiences a high level of vulnerability of its population to multiple hazards, such as floods, landslides, droughts, epidemics, coastal erosion, sea-level rise, and storms. Ongoing socio-political tensions have further contributed to a complicated context for international actors to navigate response.

Key findings

Challenges when 'localising' disaster response in post-conflict scenarios:

- Institutional volatility and hierarchical governance structures created space for competition between state institutions, leading to delays in the response
- The voices of non-state responders had different weights in the response. Within the state-led response, some donors were able to steer response outcomes, such as the implementation of the cash transfers
- The state's presence at the community level limited the role of the chiefs and affected communities' perceptions of the state.

Guiding questions for Think-Table discussion

1. How do we unpack multiple local levels of decision-making?
2. What problems and tensions might arise when a weak state and strong non-state actors work on disaster response?

Think-Table Theme

Intervention design

Reading material

Sierra Leone: Localizing disaster response in a post-conflict setting, Samantha Melis
www.iss.nl/en/media/2019-04-mudslide-response-sierra-leone

Sample Running Orders

One-hour lunch session

Activity/task	Time allocation
Introduction, overview of session	5 minutes
Thematic discussion (access, intervention design, safety and security)	30 minutes
Discussion of key takeaways from the discussion	15 minutes
Discussion on next steps and wrap	5 minutes

Three-hour lunch session

Activity/task	Time
Introduction, overview of session	5 minutes
Warm-up, watch animation and videos, introductions by participants	30 minutes
Overview of the research project, themes, and case studies	15 minutes
Introduce breakout rooms	5 minutes
Breakout Session 1 One group per theme (access, intervention design, safety and security) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group size per theme can vary but should stay relatively manageable Appoint one chair to each room Explore theme and conflict scenarios through research case studies and own experiences, using ToolKit lead and guiding questions as a starting point 	30 minutes (dedicate at least 30 minutes to each theme)
Break	5 minutes
Plenary 1 Chairs to summarise feedback on different thematic discussions, reflections	15 minutes
Breakout Session 2 One group per theme (access, intervention design, safety and security) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants to join a different theme from Breakout Session 1 	30 minutes
Plenary 2 Feedback from chairs and reflections	15 minutes
Discussion on the next steps, commitments and final thoughts, and wrap	20 minutes