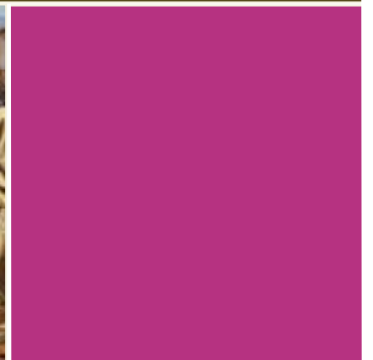




# Conflict Sensitivity Assessment of the PEAR Plus Programme

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## Search for Common Ground

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# Executive Summary

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The Programme of Expanded Assistance to Returnees (PEAR) Plus represents UNICEF's contribution to the United Nations Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (UNSSSS) in Eastern DRC. Launched in early 2009, PEAR Plus aims to support durable solutions for the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs), in North and South Kivu, North Katanga and Ituri. The programme adopts a multi-sectoral approach, with activities in the areas of education, child protection, health, and water and sanitation.

In order to reinforce the peacebuilding dimension of PEAR Plus, UNICEF has established a partnership with the peacebuilding NGO Search for Common Ground (SFCG). This study has been commissioned as a first step in this collaboration to assess the conflict sensitivity of the current version of PEAR Plus and to help orientate the second phase of the partnership. By providing concrete recommendations of how this element of the programme could be enhanced. The study was conducted during a period of two months, starting with a desk review of relevant documentation and literature. A field mission was carried out from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> July 2009 in Goma (North Kivu), Bukavu and Uvira (South Kivu) and Bunia (Ituri). This report is the result of an analysis based on the desk review and over 70 semi-structured interviews with representatives of UNICEF, SFCG, implementing partners of PEAR and PEAR Plus, State representatives, international agencies, and other resource persons. Field visits have been conducted in some of the implementation areas of PEAR and PEAR Plus.

Conflicts in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are extremely complex, characterized by an overlap of different levels – local, provincial, national and regional – and by a proliferation of actors. The violence and abuses of the armed groups are well documented and represent the most visible manifestation of conflicts in the region. There are, however, many other forms of violence at the local level – less visible but equally disruptive to the social fabric. Land problems are at the heart of conflicts in eastern DRC at all levels and are closely intertwined with inter-ethnic tensions, particularly between groups considered as indigenous and those accused of being 'foreigners'. The immense mineral wealth of eastern DRC has allowed for the financing of the conflict and has, to some extent, become a self-perpetuating factor. Widespread unemployment and lack of opportunities for the youth translate into a seemingly bottomless reserve of potential recruits for armed groups and criminal networks. At the same time, the Congolese State is unable to play its role of manager of social affairs and arbiter of local conflicts.

Underpinning the notion of conflict sensitivity is the idea that no intervention can be neutral in a conflict setting: there is necessarily an impact – positive or negative – on conflict dynamics. The definition of conflict sensitivity revolves therefore around two pillars: (i) the imperative to 'do no harm' and (ii) the effort to actively contribute to peacebuilding. Using this conceptual framework, the study reached five key conclusions.

## 1. CONFLICT SENSITIVITY HAS NOT BEEN TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN THE DESIGN OF PEAR PLUS.

PEAR Plus is a programme aimed at accompanying the transition from humanitarian emergency to long-term development, with the goal of facilitating the reintegration of recently-returned IDPs in their communities of origin. Its very nature, therefore, addresses the consequences of conflict rather than its causes. In particular, there is no analysis of the risks that the intervention may do harm, nor any systematic strategies developed to manage the conflicts that may arise during the implementation of the programme. The contribution to

peacebuilding of PEAR Plus is therefore indirect in the context of the UN Security and Stabilisation Support Strategy (UNSSSS) of which it is a part. While 'reconciliation' and 'peacebuilding' were identified as crosscutting themes in the original PEAR Plus Programme Document, no concrete interventions were foreseen apart from a few activities in peace education.

## 2. PEAR PLUS LACKS DATA, INFORMATION AND TOOLS FOR SYSTEMATICALLY ANALYZING CONFLICT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION LOCATIONS

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Context analysis on which PEAR Plus is based do not provide enough information to allow for an in-depth understanding of the risks and opportunities in relation to conflict and peacebuilding. While PEAR Plus partners have normally several years of experience in project locations, their knowledge is not systematically tapped or shared and often remains anecdotal. As a consequence, there is no baseline against which to measure the impact of programmes on conflict dynamics.

## 3. PEAR PLUS WORKS 'AROUND' CONFLICT AVOIDING AREAS WHERE THE RISK OF CONFLICT IS HIGH.

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There are many criteria for the selection of the sites of intervention of PEAR Plus which are outlined in the report. It is not always clear how these criteria are prioritized, as different actors seem to have different perceptions in this regard. In practice, however, it appears that the areas selected for implementation are those with a low risk of inter-community conflict. During its first phase, the programme has worked around areas of conflict, and only intervenes in areas that are largely homogeneous and where there are no major tensions.

## 4. PEAR PLUS PARTNERS APPROACH CONFLICTS IN AN « AD HOC » MANNER, WITHOUT A SYSTEMATIC STRATEGY.

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Implementation partners have recognized that some activities can have negative effects on local conflicts and have searched for pragmatic solutions to address these problems. It seems that these efforts to 'do no harm' have been largely successful. However, they have been merely reactive, with no coherent strategy on how to manage these issues.

## 5. THE DEEP DISTRUST TOWARDS THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN EASTERN DRC WILL MAKE THE INCLUSION OF CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IN THE PEAR PLUS CHALLENGING.

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In principle, humanitarian aid is welcome by the war-affected population and by local authorities. However, there is a widespread feeling that assistance is too limited, biased, and that often it serves the interests of the 'humanitarian industry' rather than those of the local population. Rumors and myths about the humanitarian community's 'hidden agenda' circulate freely and over the years international actors (primarily, but not exclusively, the MONUC) have been the targets of criticism and protests. This makes the integration of conflict sensitivity more difficult, but all the more necessary.

Based on this analysis, three scenarios and possible strategies for the future of PEAR Plus are proposed for UNICEF's and SFCG's consideration.

### SCENARIO « STATUS QUO »

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While there has not been a systematic effort to integrate a dimension of 'do no harm' into the programme's activities, the risks for PEAR Plus to exacerbate existing tensions or to create new ones are rather limited. The criteria for the selection of implementation sites leaves out the most problematic areas and the sectoral activities of PEAR Plus do not deal with sensitive issues or touch the heart of local conflicts. Where these risks have been encountered, the project staff has dealt with them in a pragmatic fashion. In other words, the risk of 'doing harm' is sufficiently low that the status quo can be considered a feasible option. This means, however, that the PEAR Plus will continue to work 'around' rather than 'on' conflict, without seizing opportunities for peacebuilding.

### SCENARIO « ENHANCED CONFLICT SENSITIVITY »

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The second scenario aims to increase conflict sensitivity within the current programme framework, but without significant changes at the strategic level. This scenario rests on five key pillars : (i) increased capacity

to analyze conflict ; (ii) training on conflict sensitivity for implementing partners and their staff ; (iii) additional peacebuilding activities ; (iv) a communication strategy to ensure transparency in programming and in the relations between international actors and their local partners ; and (v) a monitoring and evaluation strategy that focuses explicitly on conflict sensitivity.

#### SCENARIO « IN-DEPTH CONFLICT SENSITIVITY »

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This scenario envisages the transformation of PEAR Plus into an explicit peacebuilding programme, which calls for a fundamental rethinking of the logic and the strategy of the programme. Changes include an in-depth, periodic conflict analysis; an increased flexibility to adapt the programme's implementation to the results of the conflict analysis ; and a system of monitoring and evaluation that uses these results as a baseline for future interventions. As a consequence, this scenario will have a deep impact on the programme's ability to "do no harm" and to contribute to peacebuilding, at both the micro and the macro level. These changes are feasible, but they require a strong political will on the part of UNICEF to change more deeply in their management and implementation methods.

Both the second and the third scenario open up interesting opportunities for collaboration between UNICEF and Search for Common Ground (SFCG). The philosophy of SFCG is based on the idea of conflict transformation, whose aim is not to eliminate conflict, but to help people see what they have in common, beyond their differences. Therefore, SFCG aims to promote dialogue grounded on commonalities, without ignoring differences. The experience of SFCG represents a useful complement for UNICEF, in particular with regard to conflict analysis; strategies to favor transparency and rumor management, and implementation of specific activities promoting dialogue and reconciliation.