



Strategic Action Matrix

This Strategic Action Matrix (SAM) is a tool designed by ZIF¹ for use in peace operations and planning processes in other contexts to help translate conflict analysis results into suitable interventions and targeted activities through a sequence of easy-to-apply, cumulative steps. SAM's four steps, best tackled in a group setting, can be used at all levels from Field Office to Mission HQ.

Overview of Steps

The purpose of **STEP 1** is to identify and distinguish potential entry points for a subsequent intervention. The starting point is a local-level conflict analysis using the Conflict Tree analysis tool.

STEP 2 entails a comprehensive assessment of the thematic entry points identified in STEP 1, in order to determine the potential for and timing of an intervention and identify relevant target groups, issue champions and potential spoilers.

A whole range of possible interventions can be considered to address conflicts at the local level. **STEP 3** narrows down the choices of intervention and matches them to the entry point(s) identified.

In **STEP 4**, the selected type and format of an intervention is tailored to specific circumstances, as well as available mission resources and capacities. Then, activities necessary to implement the planned intervention(s) are designed.

N.B.! At all stages **risks** as well as **issues of diversity** (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, political views and social status) have to be considered as they are likely to influence the choice or format of an intervention.

STEP 1 Identifying & prioritizing entry points

Using the Conflict Tree² analysis tool, root causes, manifest issues and dynamic factors of a conflict at the local level are determined in STEP 1. The results of the conflict analysis undergo a first screening in order to narrow down the list of thematic issues to those that are considered strategically important and operationally feasible. One option to do so is to cluster the issues according to their complexity and strategic importance with the help of a Prioritization Chart³. Issues placed in the chart should be rephrased as targeted objectives. A thorough assessment of the entry points then follows in STEP 2. Thematic issues might be political, social, economic, cultural, environmental, legal or security-related, or a mix of these. Narratives/perceptions matter at least as much as factual realities and can serve as a thematic entry point, too.

Outcome STEP 1: A selection of not more than three or four thematic issues which are deemed strategically important priorities.

Example: The issue “lack of trust between communities” has been selected from the Conflict Tree as a prioritized entry point and rephrased as the targeted objective “building trust between communities.”

Issue of diversity: Lack of trust manifests itself differently among different groups (e.g. gender, ethnicity, religion).

Risk: An intervention might exacerbate the marginalization of a particular group and benefit spoilers.

STEP 2 Assessing entry points

Following the initial screening in STEP 1, the chosen entry points have to be assessed in detail as to how they can or should be pursued through an intervention. These are then matched with stakeholders, such as target groups, potential issue champions and/or spoilers. Stakeholders can be individuals, groups or institutions. This (non-exhaustive) list of questions helps to guide the assessment process:

What? Identify issues the mission can realistically and usefully tackle, considering:

- The mission's mandate and comparative advantage,
- Existing activities, gaps or blind spots,
- Available resources, capacities and cooperation, and
- The reputation/credibility of the mission.

For and with whom? By way of a Stakeholders' Relationship Mapping⁴ determine the actors most relevant to engage on the selected entry point. Consider the following:

- To what extent are stakeholders part of governing authorities (state, semi-state, non-state)/elites or belong to vulnerable/marginalized groups?
- Do stakeholders have sufficient authority to participate in an intervention and implement potential solutions?
- At what level do the stakeholders primarily operate (local, national, (sub-)regional, international)?
- What does an analysis of the stakeholders' positions, interests, needs and fears reveal (e.g. through the Onion⁵ conflict analysis tool)? Is there common ground among

¹ For more information, please contact research@zif-berlin.org.

² <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-security-studies/pdfs/Conflict-Analysis-Tools.pdf> (p. 4)

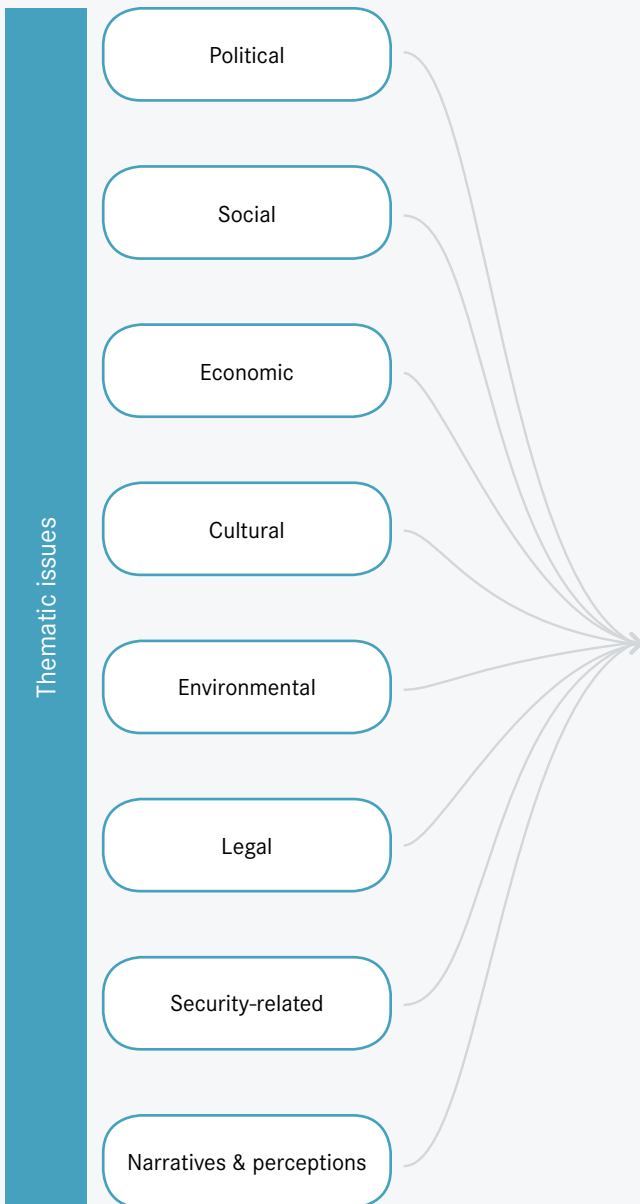
³ <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/sites/police/documents/Policy.pdf> (p. 25)

⁴ <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-security-studies/pdfs/Conflict-Analysis-Tools.pdf> (p. 5)

⁵ <https://workingwithconflict.wordpress.com/2013/04/15/conflict-analysis-tools/>

STEP 1

Identifying & prioritizing entry points



STEP 2

Assessing entry points



Risks & issues of diversity

the parties' interests? Can an intervention help alleviate the stakeholders' fears and address needs?

- Is there a risk that particular stakeholders will turn into spoilers if left out?

When? Assess whether the time is right for an intervention and whether there is a window of opportunity. If not now, when could be a (more) suitable time?

- Have the parties to a conflict (or other stakeholders) reached a point where alternative means of achieving results are exhausted (mutually hurting stalemate/conflict ripeness) and a possible intervention seems acceptable?

Outcome STEP 2: A set of issues vetted for their feasibility, suitability and ripeness matched with a set of relevant actors filtered by positions, interests, needs and fears as well as a sense of available capacities and resources.

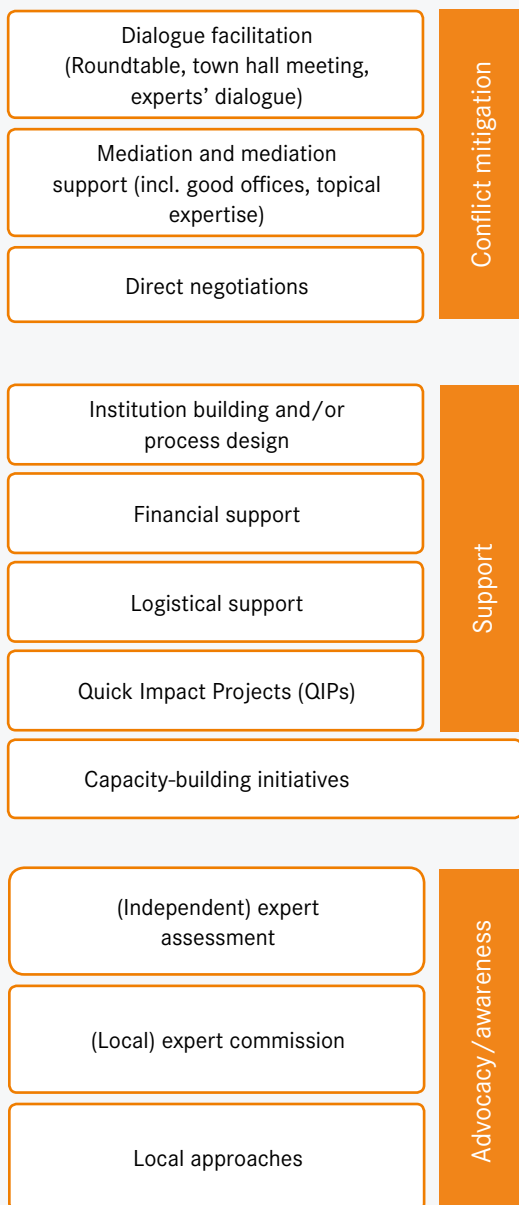
Example: The objective to build trust between communities has been confirmed as within your mission's mandate, as well as operationally and politically feasible. The stakeholders' relationship mapping led to the selection of two communities as target groups, several NGOs as champions and the mayor of one of the communities as a potential spoiler. There is common ground among the stakeholders with respect to their interest in strengthening public safety.

Issue of diversity: The particular interests and needs of a marginalized group have been identified and will be considered in further steps.

Risk: The stakeholders' relationship mapping has misidentified a champion or a potential spoiler whose engagement may have to be (re-)considered in the next steps.

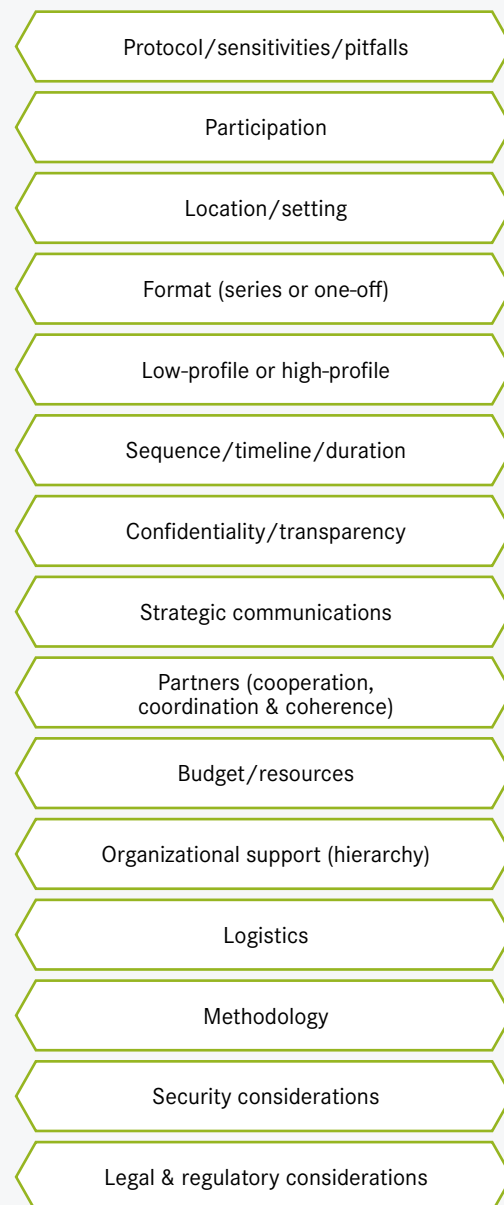
STEP 3

Matching types of intervention



STEP 4

Designing activities



Risks & issues of diversity

STEP 3 Matching types of intervention

Each of the entry points should now have been assessed sufficiently to match them with a specific intervention. The broad categories below describe potential types of direct or indirect interventions and provide ideas for possible formats. All activities can serve as confidence-building measures, i.e. contribute to an environment that is conducive to fostering and increasing mutual confidence between the conflict parties or even within the parties. The chosen type of intervention and format will then be refined further in the next step.

Conflict-mitigation interventions: Formats of personal interaction between the conflict parties either through a facilitating/mediating role or by means of direct engagement with the conflict parties. These interventions can either be directly conducted by mission staff or through suitable proxies, i.e. civil society organizations, insider mediators, eminent persons, etc.

- Dialogue facilitation formats including roundtables, workshops, etc.
- Town hall/open meetings
- Traditional local dialogue formats, e. g. elders' council
- Mediation and mediation support activities (e. g. provision of topical expertise, capacity building for (local) insider mediators, good offices)
- Direct negotiations

Support mechanisms: Interventions that have a limited degree of involvement and consist mostly of either financial or logistical support. Impact is mainly achieved through the entities that are receiving the support.

- Financial support
- Quick Impact Projects (or projects with the assistance of partner organizations)
- Logistical support

Capacity-building/development initiatives: Formats that support the development of either individual or group capacities or strengthen structures and processes that help mitigate causes of conflict.

- Trainings, workshops, facilitated fora
- Mentoring programs

Advocacy/awareness raising: Activities that address prevailing narratives, perceptions or recurring themes with the aim to mitigate tensions by providing objective, fact-based information.

- (Independent) expert assessment
- (Local) expert commission
- Local awareness-raising approaches, such as theater plays, storytelling, radio programming

Outcome STEP 3: A suitable type of intervention and specific format matched with the assessed thematic issues and relevant stakeholders.

Example: A roundtable was identified as a suitable type of intervention to build trust between the target communities and strengthen public safety.

Issue of diversity: The roundtable should be inclusive and offer access to participation by all relevant groups.

Risk: The roundtable may offer the possibility of access, but may not in fact be equally accessible for logistic, geographic or other reasons and therefore exacerbate the existing distrust between communities.

STEP 4 Designing activities

The questions below highlight key considerations for further tailoring the intervention, as well as designing, planning and implementing activities.

Mission-specific considerations:

- What is your budget and what (other) resources (human, topical expertise, etc.) can you draw on?
- How does your intervention fit into other ongoing activities? Who might your partners be?
- How can you ensure coordination, cooperation and coherence (for instance with local conflict-resolution mechanisms or partners on the ground)?
- What are threats to the intervention and how can they be mitigated? Who might be spoilers and how can their influence be limited?

- What support do you need from your own or other organizations (e.g. logistical support or political commitment)? What risk management measures should you take?
- Are there legal or regulatory constraints that need to be kept in mind?

Practical considerations:

- What are the first steps to start implementing the activity?
- Where should the activity take place? What is a suitable and conducive setting?
- Who should (not) participate/who is the wider target audience? How should invitations be issued and managed?
- What practical aspects do you need to consider, such as transport, translation, facilities, security, catering, etc.?

Methodological considerations:

- Should this be a one-off activity or a series of activities?
- Should it be a low- or high-profile intervention? Should the intervention take place in secret? How to deal with the media/public outreach? What tools would you need?
- How important is transparency for the success of the intervention?
- What is a suitable and realistic timeline?
- How should activities be sequenced?
- What methodology would best support your desired outcome? And is it feasible under the given circumstances?

Outcome STEP 4: The aim, approach, target group and timeline, as well as the required practical arrangements, resources and capacities for implementing the activity.

Example: A decision on a series of roundtables was made. The intervention was tailored to the available financial, logistical and personnel resources; a lead for planning and implementation determined, and the intervention has the backing of the mission. Security concerns have been considered.

Issue of diversity: A series of roundtables may allow the overall intervention to be more inclusive and offer wide participation.

Risk: A series of roundtables may take longer than originally planned requiring additional resources and careful management of expectations.

Implementation and Next Steps

Completing the steps above will provide a basic structure for any planned activity. A project document based on the findings of SAM should, at a minimum, include the objective and the rationale of an intervention, the key actors and partners, and a brief description of the planned intervention. In order to move forward in implementing these activities, a plan with timelines, deliverables and a distribution of tasks and responsibilities should be developed. If SAM is applied during a planning process, it can later be used to evaluate an intervention by backtracking and identifying flawed or overlooked planning assumptions and inaccurate assessments. These insights can then inform and support planning for future interventions.