



METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Concordis International's strategic interventions are based on the following premise:

Unofficial and low profile dialogue between influential people on different sides engaged in or affected by violent conflicts about issues generating and arising from the conflict and which is informed by expert contributions:

- builds trust across lines of conflict and social divisions,
- facilitates consensus building on the basis of shared interest,
- contributes positively to negotiation processes, and
- creates the climate for more general peaceful relations.

Based on this premise, Concordis has pioneered a method of intervention which involves organization of unofficial discussions between individuals from various constituencies involved in ongoing or potential violent conflict. These discussions (called 'consultations') include up to 30 participants and last up to 5 days. They take place out of the public and media eye. The participants are senior individuals, who can influence policy, invited in a personal capacity.

Concordis' consultations are guided by the following principles:

- Conscious impartiality on the part of Concordis as facilitator
- Sustained engagement by Concordis over the long term
- The importance of discussion being informed by research into issues underlying and arising from the conflict
- The facilitation of conditions which promote openness, flexibility and freedom to develop new ideas

This paper sets out the theoretical basis upon which Concordis has developed its methodology, Concordis' commitment to ensuring that its interventions are conflict-sensitive and Concordis' understanding of the importance of gender awareness in facilitating its activities.

1. Theoretical underpinning

The premise on which Concordis' interventions is based is justified by theories of change¹ in the context of:

- peacebuilding as "the facilitation of non-exploitative, sustainable and inclusive relationships free from direct and indirect violence and the threat of such violence" [MacGinty, 2006] and
- the approach that changing ideas and incentives is important in facilitating changes in individual and social relationships.

¹ **Theory of change** is a term used to describe the links between inputs, the implementation strategy and the intended outputs and outcomes. It describes the assumed or hoped causal relationship between the activity or policy and its (intended) effects on larger peacemaking goals. A theory of change can also be described as a set of beliefs about how and why an initiative will work to change the conflict [Weiss, 1995].

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Concordis' methodology has been developed in the light of the four dimensions of conflict related change outlined by Lederach, Neufeldt and Culbertson [2007]. These dimensions and how they are addressed in Concordis' consultations are outlined in the following table:

Dimensions of conflict	Concordis' methodology
The Personal Dimension of Conflict Change: Changes in individual attitudes and behaviours change conflict dynamics.	Consultations provide opportunities for participants to listen to the views of others and encourage personal reflection.
The Relational Dimension of Conflict Change: Changes in the patterns of interpersonal communication and perceptions between individuals and communities change conflict dynamics.	Consultations are designed to encourage changes in participants' interpersonal relations by facilitating formal and informal meetings and discussions over a significant period of time.
The Structural Dimension of Conflict Change: Changes in how relationships are organized, in systems and structures and in who has access to power change conflict dynamics.	Consultations involve participants in analytical discussions concerning the organization of their society, what structural change might be necessary and how it can be facilitated in a peaceful way.
The Cultural Dimension of Conflict Change: Changes in the norms that guide patterns of behaviour change conflict dynamics.	Consultations encourage changes in thinking about issues and changes in perception about others so that attitudes developed during consultations can be "transferred" to wider groups and institutions and thus impact working practices and policies. To assist in enabling this to occur reports of consultations are disseminated publicly, where appropriate.

Concordis' methodology also draws on Lederach's concept of "levels of leadership" and seeks to engage leaders with determinant locations in the conflict. This concept and how it is reflected in Concordis' consultations are outlined in the following table:

Concept of levels of leadership	Concordis Methodology
Engaging leaders with a determinant location in the conflict might, if integrated properly, contribute to the creation of the infrastructure for sustainable peace, changing conflict dynamics.	Participants are carefully selected based upon their position within key relationships and communities, systems and structures. They have influence in and are influenced by their constituencies and many are also connected to high level policy dialogue.

Concordis also applies thinking about the dynamics of interpersonal relationships as developed by the Relationships Foundation. This thinking argues that developing and experiencing "relational proximity" in five domains creates an enhanced quality of "relational experience", which can contribute to outcomes such as trust, understanding, support, accountability and belonging and which each facilitate consensus building. These domains and how they are reflected in the design of Concordis' consultations, may be summarised in the following table:

Domain of relational proximity	Concordis Methodology
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<i>Directness</i> – proximity through reducing the extent to which relationships are mediated or filtered. This produces an experience of <i>connectedness</i> .	Provides different environments in which participants interact. Enables face to face interaction. Provides relaxing, unpressured environments. Provides opportunities to speak and socialise outside of facilitated discussions. Provides for sustained contact over a number of days.
<i>Continuity</i> – proximity through spending time in engagement. This produces a relational experience of <i>shared story</i> .	Establishes a series of meetings over time. Provides different environments in which to interact. Creates long term engagement on issues and regions.
<i>Multiplexity</i> – proximity through relating in different contexts. This leads to an experience of <i>being known</i> and having <i>mutual understanding</i> .	Consultations are informed by leading independent experts. Discussions and agendas are based on in depth research, including conflict analysis and the peacebuilding context.
<i>Parity</i> – proximity through relating on equal terms and without differentials in power. This produces the experience of <i>mutual respect</i> .	All participants have equal opportunities to contribute, regardless of their relative social positions. Participants attend in their personal capacities. Participants are asked not to attribute statements made during consultations to specific individuals or parties.
<i>Commonality</i> – proximity is achieved through having shared purposes and interests. This produces experiences of <i>unity</i> and <i>synergy</i> .	Discussions are framed to enable participants to engage in a common purpose, to identify common interests and to develop common understanding.

2. Conflict sensitivity

Another implicit element of Concordis' methodology is that policies, projects and programmes working in or on conflict should *do no harm*. Doing harm in a conflict situation means having impacts (intended or not, direct or indirect) that aggravate grievances, increase tensions or vulnerabilities, or perpetuate conflict in some way. Applying the principle of *conflict sensitivity* mitigates the likelihood of such harm by systematically taking into account both the positive and negative impact of interventions on the conflict in respect of which they are undertaken.

It is clear that efforts to address conflict issues directly or prevent violence can do harm by failing to take account of inadvertent impacts resulting from the intervention itself. Thus, just because interventions are "conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts" does not mean they are *conflict sensitive*.

Principle	Concordis Methodology
Projects and programs must be conflict sensitive and <i>do no harm</i> .	Consultations are based on robust conflict analysis

	<p>Consultations take into account existing and emerging initiatives.</p> <p>Project risk assessments include an element relating to conflict sensitivity.</p>
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3. Gender Awareness

The way women and men experience, engage in and are affected by violent conflict differs according to their gender identities. Conflict itself can often play a major role in forming a society's understanding of and responses to gender roles (what it means to be a "man" or "woman" and what is expected of and tolerated from each), and vice versa. Overly simplistic views of men and women in conflict are often based on misleading stereotypes which are neither accurate nor useful and can lead to poorly designed or mistargeted interventions.

Principle	Concordis Methodology
Interventions should be aware of the roles taken by women and men in conflict and in peacebuilding	<p>Context specific gender analysis is undertaken.</p> <p>Invitation lists are gender aware.</p> <p>Issue framing and strategic development is gender aware.</p>