Bringing Peace to Life?
A Narrative Analysis of Finnish Development Intervention in Conflict-Affected Nepal
ANISA DOTY

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of Finnish Development Intervention
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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
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Abstract

A gap between policy idea(s) of broad security and a security-development nexus, and their seeming absence in the practice of development cooperation led to this study. This research explores the practice of development in a conflict-affected context. It is a case study of a Finnish-Nepali bilateral water and sanitation project in Far Western Nepal. It asks whether or not and how it was that the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project came to take into consideration its conflict-affected operational context. The aim is to produce policy-relevant insights on the theme of aid and conflict.

The theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the study are based on a review of the shifts in security-development thinking. In focus is the notion of a peace-security-development nexus and the debate on aid and conflict. These themes provide a foundation for the four-dimensional theoretical framework, which defines interventions as working in, on or around conflict; as well as through peace and conflict sensitivity; risk management thinking; and intervention ethics.

The study is based on storied knowing (narrative cognition). It provides a grassroots perspective into development practice as a representation of the international by bringing individuals involved in the project to the fore as legitimate knowers in the sphere of International Relations. The dataset of the study is composed of project documentation, archival material, interviews and research journal entries. Informed by principles of appreciative inquiry, the research has been carried out as a configurative narrative analysis. The result is a retrospective historical narrative of the studied case project.

The studied case is set into context through three intersecting dimensions: Finnish policies guiding development cooperation; Nepal as a conflict-affected area, with focus on the Far West and Bhatakatiya VDC in Achham district; and Finnish-Nepali bilateral development cooperation.

The narrative shows that the studied project was affected by its conflict-affected context in several ways throughout its duration, and points to repeated claims within the project documentation of the intervention’s contribution to peacebuilding. Yet these claims are found to be largely void of substantial content and wanting of monitoring and evaluation to confirm them. The project’s responses to contextual challenges are disclosed as having been predominantly reactive and ad hoc. Reasons for this included thin contextual knowing and absence of local analyses, uneven and weak understanding of conflict sensitivity among project actors; as well as the vague and inconclusive policy and program guidance regarding aid in conflict-affected contexts. Further, despite a strong
emphasis in the intervention on risk management, the narrative presents the project as lacking in systematic and localized context and conflict analyses or risk assessments. On the other hand the story tells how transparency in all project work; emphasis on project actors’ local knowledge and contacts with local staff and beneficiaries; as well as adopting a participatory approach were used proactively as ways to respond to the risks perceived. Finally, the story reveals how the project was able also to respond to structural injustices and root causes of conflict through its program design based on strong local ownership as well as through its inclusive working modalities.

The findings of the empirical narrative are discussed through the theoretical framework, which presents the studied project first as having worked around, and in conflict despite the conflict: conflict was found to have been treated as a constraint to development and something to be avoided. Secondly, the study reveals the primacy of “one-way-street” risk management thinking in the project: only risks presented by the context toward the project were considered, but not vice versa. Thirdly, the project was found to have been semisensitive to conflict and to have worked intuitively in the conflict-affected context: aid actors were found to have acknowledged the conflict and to have been guided by experience of a prior Finnish development intervention in Nepal during the time of the civil war. Fourth, this research exposes the intervention design based on a rigid participatory step-by-step process of water use master planning and the approach of gender equity and social inclusion as courses through which the project may be seen as having also worked on conflict. Fifth, through a reflection of a framework of intervention ethics, this study shows how the project largely held with principles of mutuality, impartiality, consistency, and universality; how it held with the principles of sustainability and complementarity in varying degrees during different stages of the project, and how it did not quite fully live up to the principles of accountability and reflexivity.

**Key themes:** peace-security-development nexus; aid and conflict; peace and conflict sensitivity; working in, on and around conflict; risk management; intervention ethics; Finnish foreign, security and development policy; case study; narrative analysis; appreciative inquiry; Finnish-Nepali bilateral cooperation.


hanke vastasi ympäristön haasteisiin olivat enimmäksleen reaktiivisia, eivät ennalta
suunniteltuja. Syitä tähän olivat muun muassa paikallisten analyysien puuttuminen
ja ohuaksi jäänyt toimintaympäristön ymmärrys, hankkeessa toimineiden
henkilöiden epätasa- ja heikko konfliktisensitiivisyyden tuntemus sekä
puutteelliset politiikka- ja ohjelmaohjeistukset konfliktialueella toimimiseen. Tarina
paljastaa, että hankkeessa painotettiin riskien hallintaa. Tästä huolimatta hankkeessa
 ei tehty systemattisia konfliktianalyysijä eikä riskiarviointeja. Toisaalta narratiivi
osoittaa kuinka hanke toimi myös proaktiivisesti suhteessa identifioituihin riskeihin. Esimerkkejä tästä ovat läpinäkyvyys, osallistavuus sekä toimintatapa, joka painotti
paikallistuntemusta ja yhteyksää hankkeen edunsaajoihin. Tarina tuo myös esiin sen,
 että hanke kykeni vastaamaan rakenteellisen epäoikeudenmukaisuuden haasteisiin.
Keinoiina olivat paikallista omistajuutta ja sosiaalista inklusiota korostava
lähestymistapa.

Empiirinen narratiivi käsitellään työn diskussiossa teoreettisen viitekehyksen
kautta. Tutkittu hanke kuvaillaan siinä ensin konfliktia kiertäväksi ja konfliktista
huolimatta toimivaksi. Konflikti koettiin hankkeessa kehityksen esteenä ja
välteltävänä asiaan. Toiseksi tutkimus paljastaa, että riskienhallintaan liittyvä ajattelu
oli yksisuuntaista. Hankeeseen kohdistuneet riskit huomioitiin, mutta hankkeen
mahdollisesti aiheuttamia riskejä ei arvioitu lainkaan. Kolmanneksi hanke
määritellään semisensitiiviseksi suhteessa konfliktiin. Määrittelyssä huomioidaan
intuitiiviset tavat toimia konfliktista kärsineellä alueella. Hankkeen toimijat
 tunnustivat konfliktin olemassaolon ja heidän toimintaansa ohjasivat kokemukset
aiemmassa suomalaisesta kehitysinterventiosta Nepalissa sisällissodan aikana. Neljänneksi
tutkinut hankeen voi myös nähdä vaikuttaneen konfliktin syihin. Keskeisiä tekijöitä tässä oli kaksi: osallistava, paikalista omistautuva korostava
prosessi, jonka avulla laadittiin suunnitelma vesiresurssien hallitsemiseksi sekä
toimintatapa, joka korosti sukupuolten välistä tasa-arvoa ja sosiaalista inklusiota.
Viidenneksi tutkimus osoittaa, että interventioetiikan kannalta tapaushanke toimi
pitkältä vastavuoroisuuden, puolueettomuuden, johdonmukaisuuden ja
universaalisuuden periaatteiden mukaisesti. Kestävyyden ja täydentävyyden
periaatteiden osalta hanke toimi eri vaiheissaan vaihtelevasti. Tilivelvollisuuden ja
reflektiivisyyden periaatteiden osalta hanke jät puutteelliseksi.

**Asiasanat:** rauhan, turvallisuuden ja kehityksen yhteyks; avunanto ja konflikti;
konfliktisensitiivisyys; kehitysinterventiot konfliktissa (in, on, around conflict)
riskinhallinta; interventioetiikka; Suomen ulko-, turvallisuus- ja kehityspoliitikka;
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As much as this thesis is the obvious outcome of a longwinded research project, it is also a case of serendipity that presented itself and evolved as the consequence of other life circumstances. The voyage that has led to the completion of this dissertation could thus be described in a number of different ways. It could be told as a story of my fascination and work with the connections of peace, conflict and development. It could also be presented as a chronicle of struggles and countless applications for financial support, of solitary sitting and reading and writing for what seemed like ages, or of something dear and precious to nurture in the anticipation of – and subsequently while raising – a human baby. It could also be told of as a memorable visit to one of the world’s most remote and poor areas, trekking by foot to a small village in Far Western Nepal and sleeping in dirt floored houses and cooking dal bhat on an open fire, while trying to avoid swarms of flies and the itching of mosquito bites from driving me crazy. Most of all, however, this story is one of encounters with many individuals, each one different and remarkable. A significant part of this work consists of material gathered through these interactions. It is therefore the people who participated in this research that must receive my first and warmest thanks. All of you gave of your time and attention selflessly. This provided me with the opportunity to look through the windows of your lived experience onto the theme of development in a conflict-affected context. For this I am profoundly grateful, as it would have been impossible to carry out this study without your help and contributions. You are far too many to each be individually listed, and for reasons of anonymity most cannot be named. I am nevertheless pleased to have the opportunity to identify and thank some of you here. For the rest, you know who you are, so this is for you: dhanyabaad, thank you, kiitos!

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In Jätkäsaari, Helsinki, September 6th 2016

Anisa Doty
Preliminary remarks on language and writing

I have written this dissertation using spelling and punctuation rules of American English as a primary guideline. An exception to this is the marking of dates within the text body, for which I use the Finnish system of day, month, year. In cases where there is discrepancy in the spelling of words within US English, such as in the use of the term peacebuilding (often spelled also as peace building or peace-building), I have attempted to be consistent in my choice. The same applies to Nepali language words in the text. In direct quotes of other writers of research literature or project documents used as primary data, I have been loyal to each author’s writing style and spelling.

The interviews conducted for this study were carried out in Finnish, English and English-Nepali with the help of consecutive interpretation. I have translated the quotes from Finnish language transcripts into English myself with an effort to retain as much authenticity to the original language version as possible. For reasons related to ensuring anonymity of research participants, I have refrained from disclosing the original language of the interview situations where possible.

In quotes from interview transcripts, I refer to my research participants with generic titles such as “MFA official,” “Consultant,” “Local woman” etc. to denote which stakeholder group or perspective of the case study project each person belongs to. This has been done in order to secure the anonymity of the people taking part in the study. In the referencing of interviews and other primary data produced as the result of this research [the number inside brackets] signifies an identity number of the interview, research journal entry or correspondence quoted. A dash (–) is used to mark changes in thought or grammatical construction in the middle of a sentence as well as to suggest a halting or hesitance in speech. Brackets [ ] are used to enclose words or sentences that are not part of the original quotation, but have been set into the transcript to increase legibility or to provide insight to the broader conversation. Parentheses ( ) are used to enclose comments made on a verbatim transcription of speech. Ellipses (...) are used to indicate that part of the quoted text has been omitted. Italicis are used to indicate an emphasis in speech.

Finally, I have used a smiley emoji (😊) in the transcript quotes in the final text of this dissertation in places where I had drawn one into my interview notes. This refers to a feeling of amusement, laughter and/or smiles in the interview situations.
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List of abbreviations

ADB  Asian Development Bank
AI   Appreciative Inquiry
BOG  Basic Operational Guidelines
CA   Constituent Assembly
CBO  Community Based Organisation
CIDA Canadian International Development Agency
CM   Community Mobilizer
CO   Community Organization, also referred to as User Committee
CPA  Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPN-M Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist
CSA  Conflict Sensitive Approach
DAC  Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
DDC  District Development Committee
DFID Department for International Development, Government UK
DHQ  District Headquarters
DMC  District Management Committee
DNH  Do No Harm
DoLIDAR Department of Local Infrastructure Development and Agriculture Roads
DTO  District Technical Officer
EU   European Union
FCG  Finnish Consulting Group
GESI Gender and Social Inclusion
GOF  Government of Finland
GON  Government of Nepal
GTZ  Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
      /German Agency for Technical Cooperation
HDI  Human Development Indexation
ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IDA</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary Analysts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDRS</td>
<td>Integrated Development &amp; Research Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGO</td>
<td>Inter-governmental organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International non-governmental organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>IWRM</td>
<td>Integrated Water Resources Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCP</td>
<td>Local Capacities for Peace</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDC</td>
<td>Least Developed Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDO</td>
<td>Local Development Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSGA</td>
<td>Local Self-Governance Act (1999)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>MFA</td>
<td>Ministry for Foreign Affairs</td>
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<td>MLD</td>
<td>Ministry of Local Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organization</td>
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<td>NPC</td>
<td>National Planning Commission</td>
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<td>OCHA</td>
<td>Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
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<td>OD</td>
<td>Organizational development</td>
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<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>PCIA</td>
<td>Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLA</td>
<td>People’s Liberation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRSDC</td>
<td>Participatory Rural Sustainable Development Center</td>
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<td>PSU</td>
<td>Project Support Unit (of the RVWRMP)</td>
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<td>RPP</td>
<td>Reflecting on Peace Practice</td>
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<td>RSSWP</td>
<td>Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme</td>
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<td>RVWRMP</td>
<td>Rural Village Water Resources Management Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>REDP</td>
<td>(United Nations Development Program’s) Rural Energy Development Program</td>
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<td>SC</td>
<td>Steering Committee</td>
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<td>SO</td>
<td>Support Organization</td>
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<td>SPA</td>
<td>Seven Party Alliance</td>
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<td>TA</td>
<td>Technical Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>ToR</td>
<td>Terms of Reference</td>
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<tr>
<td>UC</td>
<td>Water Users Committees, or User Committees, also referred to as Community Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>VDC</td>
<td>Village Development Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>WARM-P</td>
<td>Water Resource Management Project (by Helvetas)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WASH</td>
<td>Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector</td>
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<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>WRA</td>
<td>Water Resource Adviser</td>
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<td>WSS</td>
<td>Water Supply and Sanitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>WUMP</td>
<td>Water Use Master Plan</td>
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<td>WRMSC</td>
<td>Water Resources Management Sub-Committee</td>
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1 Introduction

1.1 A gap between policy and practice?

Me: Would you say…has the relationship between development problems and the root causes of conflict been analytically opened on some level [on the Finnish policy making side]? I mean it seems to emerge here and there… But somehow maybe – and here is where my identities as a researcher and advocacy practitioner and trainer get a bit mixed – in some way I get the feeling that there is a bit of – well, a flavor of luck in all of this. That at its best and with good luck, one can do quite well [in carrying out development interventions in conflict-affected contexts]. But the planning for it doesn’t seem to be very systematic… and the theory of change goes something along the lines of: “when we do these development things – and then a miracle happens – and then it leads to peace.” I mean there’s quite a big leap of faith there?

MFA official: Yes… I can totally sign to that, and that’s how it definitely goes. [But] the analysis side has probably been strengthened recently under this umbrella concept - with the [current] discussion on fragile states… Now we have the guidance for operating in fragile states that came out in the Spring [2014], and the thinking on why states are fragile has been spelled out in it – … they are fragile, because they’ve been unable to provide basic services and goods to their citizens, which has then led to various problems. So in that way there’s more of it today. But it doesn’t necessarily translate so unambiguously from these kinds of big concepts to individual projects. So a [linking] thought is maybe missing from the middle level – there’s a kind of “dotted line” there, but…it probably doesn’t yet… It steers only the broader [policy level] thinking.1

The above excerpt is from a transcript of a discussion that I had with one of my research participants. It speaks on the gap I had perceived in my work with peace and development NGOs between Finnish and international policy statements about the interconnectedness of peace, security and development and the extent to which these ideas and ideals were present and actively being dealt with in the

---

1 Interview MFA [52] 2014.
practice of development cooperation. The quote not only reveals the curiosity that lies at the foundations of this doctoral dissertation, but also offers a glimpse as to where I have come from into this study.

Development policy², with development cooperation as its main instrument, is portrayed as being an integral part of Finland’s foreign policy and security policy. One of the aims of [development] policy has further been described in the Finnish policy context as being to continually strive to improve the effectiveness of measures taken, and their coherence with other policy sectors.³ Notions of broad security as well as the links between peace/security, development and human rights have long been present in Finnish policy texts.⁴ Yet past and existing policies and

---

² Finland’s development policy is outlined in the Development Policy Programme. Finland’s development cooperation, operational priorities and principles are defined by the Development Policy Programme together with other foreign and security policies and programs such as the Action Plan for Mediation, the UN Strategy, the Democracy Support Policy, the NGO Policy, the Civilian Crisis Management Strategy, the Comprehensive Crisis Management Strategy, the Humanitarian Assistance Policy, the Aid for Trade Action Plan, the Human Rights Strategy and the Human Rights Policy Action Plan implementing it, Finland’s National 1325 Action Plan and long-term bilateral development cooperation country programs relating to partner countries. At the time of writing this dissertation Finnish development activities have been based on the UN Millennium Development Goals from 2000. The international community, led by the UN has recently negotiated new global goals for sustainable development that will also affect Finnish development policy and development cooperation together with several other national policy sectors. See "What is development policy and development cooperation," Ministry for Foreign Affairs, http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?nodeid=49312&contentlan=2&culture=en-US#What (accessed 07/1, 2015).

³ "Principles of development policy and development cooperation," Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=69837&culture=en-US (accessed 3/2, 2015). The wording on the MFA website has been revised since this quote was retrieved. Development policy is now called an “important” part of foreign and security policy. Moreover, development cooperation is currently framed as “one way of implementing development policy,” and the role of other policy sectors such as those concerning security, trade, agriculture, environment and migration is brought to the fore more strongly. See "Objectives and principles of Finland's development policy," Ministry for Foreign Affairs, http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentId=328294&nodeId=49312&contentlan=2&culture=en-US (accessed 12/19, 2015).

⁴ Finland's foreign, security and development policies and development cooperation strive to be in line first and foremost with EU commitments. They are also linked to development goals, resolutions and guidelines issued by other structures of broad-based international cooperation, including the UN, the OECD/DAC, the Council of Europe and the OSCE. The links between peace, security, development and human rights are established in all of the above. In addition to the policies mentioned in footnote 2 above, for examples of Finnish policy commitments valid at the time of this case study project and linked to the notion of broad security and a peace-development nexus, see e.g. Development Policy Programme, Government Resolution 2007; Development Policy, Government Resolution 2004; Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2004, Government Report 6/2004; Finland’s Report on the Millennium Development Goals. Also the Government Programme of Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen’s Government 24 June, 2003 and the Government Programme of
guidelines have remained largely vague and abstract, failing to provide guidance for how to put these ideas into practice. At the same time a significant share of Finnish official development assistance (ODA) has been directed to conflict-affected areas, commonly referred to as fragile contexts.

Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's second Cabinet 19 April, 2007 include the notion of broad security and a peace-development nexus. The policy context of this case study will be discussed in more detail in chapter four. For recent research on the notion of comprehensive security in Finnish foreign and security policy consisting of an analysis of its political viability and operability, see Minna Branders, "Kokonainen turvallisuus? Kokonaisturvallisuuden poliittinen kelpoisuus ja hallinnollinen toteutettavuus" (PhD diss., University of Tampere, 2016) 246.

5 Henni Alava, "Exploring the Security-Development Nexus Perspectives from Nepal, Northern Uganda and 'Sugango'," (Helsinki: Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010). It was not until 2014 that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs published a guideline on working in fragile contexts. See Finland's Development Policy and Development Cooperation in Fragile States - Guidelines for Strengthening Implementation of Development Cooperation (Helsinki: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014).

6 Official Development Assistance (ODA) is the public funding provided to developing countries through the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) – Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

7 The notion of fragility is said to have initially emerged from within the arena of national security after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and has since gained increasing attention in development discourse. The concept of fragility, however, remains fuzzy and elusive, and the limited consensus in the literature on fragility suggests that the analytical salience and direct operational added value remain unclear. There is no globally agreed definition or unambiguous list of fragile states. Different organizations approach fragility in different ways, and instead of the term fragile states, the term fragile situations is also often used to emphasize the temporary nature of problems, or fragile societies, to reduce the centrality of government structure. According to the OECD states are fragile when they are unable or unwilling to perform the functions necessary for poverty reduction, the promotion of development, protection of the population, and the observance of human rights. Naudé et al. see fragility as a continuum and claim: “… all states are fragile to various degrees, in various domains, and over different time periods.” See Simone Bertoli and Elisa Ticci, "A Fragile Guideline to Development Assistance," Development Policy Review 30, no. 2 (2012) 211-230; Wim A. Naudé, Amelia Uliafnova Santos Paulino and Mark McGillivray, Fragile States: Causes, Costs, and Responses (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Finland's Development Policy and Development Cooperation in Fragile States - Guidelines for Strengthening Implementation of Development Cooperation. Due to the elusive and fuzzy nature of the concept of fragility as well as its lack of analytical salience I refer to Nepal in this dissertation as a conflict-affected context, which I have found to be a somewhat less problematic description of the chosen country context of this case study research.

8 Jon Bennett and David Fleming, Peace and Development in Finland's Development Cooperation: Synthesis (Helsinki: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014) xi, 82. According to OECD/DAC the net disbursements from Finland in 2011 to its list of fragile states (51 countries) was $223 million, forming 0,12% of Finland’s gross national income. According to the MFA website, “[i]n future, all development cooperation will be concentrated more and more in the least developed African countries, as well as in the so-called fragile states…” See "Development policy and development cooperation," Ministry for Foreign Affairs, http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?nodeid=49312&contentlan=2&culture=en-US#What (accessed 06/1, 2015).
Being able to function effectively and sustainably in conflict-affected contexts poses a real challenge to development actors. It demands the adoption of new ways of thinking and acting that would concretely help in bringing together issues of peace, security and development. Furthermore, it brings an additional burden to the already full agenda of multiple crosscutting principles and objectives\(^9\) that development actors are compelled to take into consideration in their work.

As explained above through the opening quote, a core assumption from the outset of this research project for me has been that the links between peace, security and development spelled out on the policy and strategy levels of development have been largely missing or are at most vague in the context of Finnish development\(^10\) practice. The interest of knowledge (see figure 1) for this

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\(^9\) In addition to the overall human/rights based approach, there are three compulsory crosscutting objectives for Finnish development: gender equality, climate sustainability, and decreasing inequalities. Each of these thematic areas require a high level of specific expertise not only to conduct thematic analyses but also to feed the results thereof into program design and implementation. Ibid.

\(^10\) I use the expression Finnish development in a broad sense to mean not only development activities conducted through bilateral cooperation by Finnish actors and/or by use of Finnish ODA-funding, but also to signify the wider interested Finnish development community (including decision- and policy- makers, civil society actors, development NGOs, researchers etc.)
study rises from this perceived gap between policy idea(l)s and the way development interventions\textsuperscript{11} are carried out in practice. In this setting, I have adopted an understanding of the formulation and execution of policy as an interactive continuum.\textsuperscript{12} I thus view the policy process as a cyclical or wave-like motion over time: what happens on the level of praxis feeds into the content and formulation of policy, and policy in turn has an effect on the content and way things are done on the practical level.\textsuperscript{13} (See figure 2)

\textsuperscript{11} I use the term development intervention interchangeably with development aid and development cooperation, and understand it as a combination of definitions by Laue and Koponen & Seppänen. Laue sees an intervention as occurring “...when an outside or semi-outside party self-consciously enters into a ... situation with the objective of influencing [it] in a direction the intervener defines as desirable” Koponen et al. in turn explain that from a developmentalist perspective development cooperation and development aid may be understood as a planned development intervention, the aim of which is to achieve positive change in a certain time and place with a certain contribution of resources. The objective of transferring resources is to enhance the development of its recipients, in whichever way it is defined in international developmentalist discourse in any given time. Juhani Koponen and Maaria Seppänen, ”Kehitysyhteistyön monet kasvot,” in Kehitysmaatutkimus: johdatus perusteuksiin, eds. Juhani Koponen, Jari Lanki and Anna Kervinen (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2007) 338-339; Sandra Cheldelin, Daniel Druckman and Larissa Fast, "Conflict: From Analysis to Intervention," (New York: Continuum, 2003) 189-190.


From this point of departure then, this study takes on the task of exploring development cooperation practice in a conflict-affected context, and aims to produce new and empirically based knowledge about the topic. By creating this type of knowledge, this research simultaneously informs both ends of the ongoing interactive policy process, as described above. Herein lies the practical relevance of this study.

Further, I approach this study from the perspective of IR/world politics in that the interlinkages of peace, security and development are not viewed as merely elements of Finnish policy. Instead, the themes of this study are understood as being part of a whole comprised of both national and international politics/policies.¹⁴

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1.2 Previous research

This study contributes to two separate but interlinked bodies of research. The first of these is research on the themes of aid in conflict(-affected) contexts and the peace-conflict-development nexus. Although the intersections of peace, conflict and development have been the concern of peace and conflict studies and research on peacebuilding internationally already for some 20 years, much of the research continues to show that aid actors are not necessarily applying all of the known best practices to their work. This study therefore contributes to shedding light on why this might be the case. Further, despite the commonly held assumption that development interventions inevitably become part and parcel of the contexts in which they operate, the theme of aid in conflict has been largely untouched in the realm of research on Finnish foreign, security and development policy. Thus, from another perspective, this study is a contribution to a body of research on Finnish development policy and practice, with a particular focus on the Finnish-Nepali aid relationship. Against this background, this section on previous research is divided accordingly into two respective parts.

1.2.1 Conflict and development interventions

Design and implementation of development interventions is challenging under the best of circumstances. In situations of conflict or in conflict-affected contexts the challenge may turn out to be overwhelming. A fundamental question is whether to intervene at all. And if the decision is made to intervene, then under which conditions and according to what kind of processes and ethical criterion should this happen? What about the extent to which development aid can be seen as helping to pacify and bring stability to conflict and conflict-affected areas? How/does aid contribute to conflict transformation and the building of peace? Do development interventions consider and really know their local conflict settings and are they designed accordingly, or do they inadvertently end up reinforcing conflict dynamics or creating new tensions? These questions have become increasingly important for the growing international involvement in conflict and conflict-affected areas. Yet, despite there being only little clarity on these issues, the
international community continues to place high bets on the assumption that aid, properly administered, can generate peace.  

What then, do we know through previous research about the relationship between aid interventions and conflict? Christoph Zürcher explains how macro-economic research has identified various ways in which aid might be seen to contribute to more stability. According to some scholars, correctly phased aid can spur economic growth that will make states less prone to civil wars. Others argue that aid may help peace by strengthening political institutions by building administrative capacity or creating incentives for policy change where “predatory elites deliberately misuse administrative capacity for private gains.” Others yet claim aid increases the democratic quality of political institutions that will also make a country less prone to war. Zürcher points out that being able to show (and know) whether aid has a beneficial impact through growth, by increasing institutional capacity or making states more democratic, takes a considerable amount of time. In the meantime a plethora of stabilization, reconstruction and development interventions continue to operate in precarious environments where pressure groups and armed fractions act by using or threatening with the use of violence. A common characteristic of these unstable operational contexts are weak governments that are unable or unwilling to provide for the human security and basic needs of their populations, and where significant segments of the populations are reluctant to align with the government and its foreign backers. Hence, claims Zürcher, the lessons of the macro-economic literature are of little use to those planning and standing in the frontlines of aid interventions. The people working in the frameworks of aid operations in these kinds of troubled contexts are faced with the task of creating safe operating environments, and convincing local partners that it is worth cooperating with the government and its foreign backers.  

Research on the impacts of aid in conflict zones continues to be scarce. The empirical studies that have been carried out have found evidence of the destabilizing effects of aid, and note missing correlations between aid delivery

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15 As an example of this, Zürcher writes that in 2010 the international community committed USD 162,83 billion for various reconstruction projects in Iraq alone, and in Afghanistan, donors spent or pledged USD 98 billion during the same year. See e.g. Christoph Zürcher. "Conflict, State Fragility and Aid Effectiveness: Insights from Afghanistan," Conflict, Security & Development 12, no. 5 (2012) 470.

16 Ibid. 471.

17 Zürcher refers here to a study conducted by researchers (Fishstein and Wilder, 2012, Winning Hearts and Minds) from Tufts University based on 574 interviews.
and perceptions of security. It has further been discovered that aid has marginal effect on how international actors are perceived by beneficiaries. Security, in turn, seems to be the determinant factor here, as foreign interventions have been found to be popular only when people have felt that international actors have been able to increase their personal security. Nevertheless, claims Zürcher, development and military actors alike share the basic assumption that higher levels of acceptance of interventions by locals increase efficiency and reduce security threats.

Henni Alava et al. published a study in 2010 on the security-development nexus. Fragile and conflict-affected situations were portrayed in the research report as complex contexts operationally. Based on their research, Alava et al. claimed that international discourse and guidelines for such situations suffers from gaps and deficiencies; and as such they are unable to provide practitioners with sufficient guidance for action. Instead of providing a list of guidelines to fill in this gap, Alava et al. raise a number of issues that they see “requiring special attention when working in fragile states and situations.” These include for aid actors to have “an in-depth understanding and conceptualization of the situation,” to maintain “an open mind and sensitivity to the complexity [of their operational contexts]… [and to] recognise that there are no easy solutions, that they themselves may become part of the problem, and that…there are ways to minimize potential harm that may be done.” They further make a case for donors to be attentive as to the choice of actors and channels of action, and suggest that Finland as a donor should direct its funds to conflict-affected regions through actors that have long-term, in-depth knowledge of the area, be it through bilateral, multilateral or non-governmental organizations. Alava and others go on to maintain that projects carried out in conflict-affected areas should “employ sufficient staff with knowledge of the

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18 Zürcher (ref. Böhnke, Koehler and Zürcher) points with this to a longitudinal study carried out through three mass surveys among 2000 households in 80 communities in North-East Afghanistan in 2007, 2009 and 2011.

19 Referring to Harmer and Stoddard (2005, Room to Maneuver), Zürcher notes contrary to these research findings, that acceptance is viewed as one of the most difficult, yet most effective and principled means to decrease risk to aid actors. The thinking behind this is that aid agencies should strive to become familiar and trusted entities on the ground level of interventions, cultivate a network of contacts in order for communication to flow openly with key stakeholders, and that all of this requires a long-term presence in country pre-, during, and post-conflict. See Zürcher (2012) 472. For discussion on acceptability of aid programs in Nepal, see also e.g. Masud Hossain, Lauri Siitonen and Sudhindra Sharma, Development Co-operation for Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution: Scope and Potentialities of Finland’s Development Co-operation in Nepal (Helsinki: Institute of Development Studies, University of Helsinki, 2007) 76-77.
operating context, rather than prioritising technical know-how,” and state: “staff should be well trained in conflict sensitive approaches to aid.”

A 2011 study by the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA) on “local perceptions of international engagement in fragile states and situations,” in turn, found that while international engagement can make a difference by creating a pitch for peace, the decisions on what assistance is provided, how it is delivered, to whom it is provided and when it is delivered has a profound impact on whether it exacerbates existing tensions or supports local capacities for peace and development. The CDA study also found that assistance often continues to do harm, and that international actors frequently fail to take the time to fully understand the context and tend to apply pre-packaged programming rather than truly tailoring assistance to the realities of the aid recipients’ contexts.

In their study of the German Development Co-operation Agency’s work over a decade ago, De la Haye et al. identified possible causes of what they called “conflict ignorance,” typical of development interventions. They found that the two-fold (i.e. positive and negative) impacts of interventions are easily ignored due to the demanding circumstances of project implementation in complex operational contexts. In other cases they found that there might be fear within the stakeholder communities that problems arising from the context may be ascribed to staff incompetence. The transmission of such information might result in the feasibility of a project being called into question or being completely abandoned due to fears of insecurity. De la Haye et al. also claim that there is a tendency in development cooperation measures to devise mechanisms that protect project activities from hostile environments rather than taking direct and appropriate account of conflict situations. Consequently, project teams may have vested interests in ensuring technical implementation and in ignoring the political dynamics of the context.

Coming back to what is now broadly accepted as common knowledge about development interventions in conflict and conflict-affected areas, Zürcher explains

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20 Alava, Exploring the Security-Development Nexus Perspectives from Nepal, Northern Uganda and 'Sugango' 15-16.
23 These causes for conflict ignorance were identified in connection to the work done by the German Development Co-operation Agency.
the potential of aid to do harm in certain types of conditions as being a sum of parts. Two of the challenges he raises are those related to contextual knowing, and to monitoring of resource transfers. First is the perspective that these societies are barely intelligible to outsiders. Secondly, there is a massive influx of resources into these contexts where it is virtually impossible to track them. The combination of these two factors coupled with existing sources of executive power based on governance models that are incompatible with international actors’ liberal visions, makes for an operational challenge. In his 2011 interview study with Canadian aid practitioners, Zürcher found that the lack of information about the political economy in the contexts studied was one of the biggest challenges that aid actors face in the field. His respondents all felt that an effort to gather and share data among aid actors working in the same area is crucial to understanding the local context. Without more intimate knowledge about specific local power constellations, they said it was difficult to target aid efficiently.24 Michael Johnston and Jesper Johnson reported similar findings from their 2014 study consisting of interviews with 93 individuals working across 29 “fragile situations.” Most of their respondents had stated a thorough analysis of context-specific cultural and political issues as being essential to “minimizing stresses.” “If you don’t know the context you will never know whether you do harm,” the researchers phrased their conclusions. Knowing the context is, however, not enough, claim Johnston and Johnson: “aid agencies must also respond to it by changing strategy and implementation [accordingly].”25 Zürcher also calls for better contextual understanding: “We – practitioners and scholars alike – should invest much more in our capacity to decipher the puzzling societies in which we intervene.”26 Goodhand and Hulme arrived at similar conclusions through their extensive in-depth comparative case study research of NGOs and communities in Afghanistan, Liberia and Sri Lanka conducted in 1997-199927. In addition to a call for enhanced context analysis and needs assessments, Goodhand and Hulme’s recommendations

24 Zürcher 472-473.
26 Zürcher 477. The in-depth understanding of a conflict context and the conflict dynamics is a key element of peace and conflict sensitive approaches. This will be discussed further below.
included further consultations of local stakeholders and incorporation of local coping strategies into aid actors’ programs.\textsuperscript{28}

The second main challenge for interventions in conflict areas mentioned by Zürcher was that related to international donors’ difficulty or inability to monitor resource flows and implementation processes. Referring to an independent 2011 study commissioned by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), he claims, “with increasing insecurity, many development organisations have resorted to ‘remote control’ aid programmes, though most observers agree that long-distance monitoring is less than ideal.” The lack of monitoring capacity has been found to have grave reputational costs for aid organizations. For instance in Afghanistan surveys have revealed widespread resentment of the aid sector founded on the assumption that implementing agencies regularly misuse a large part of resources. Moreover, other research has noted widespread complaints about the “senseless disbursement” of aid money filtered through various NGO programs as well as the high salaries of aid employees and NGO staff hired by international implementing agencies. According to Andrew Wilder, “[t]he most destabilizing effect of aid, however, is its role in fuelling massive corruption...”\textsuperscript{29}

The research led by Mary B. Anderson on Local Capacities for Peace (LCP) showed that when given in conflict settings, international assistance can reinforce, exacerbate, and prolong conflict; but it can also help to reduce tensions and strengthen people’s capacities to find peaceful options for solving problems and to disengage from fighting. The LCP project stretched out over several years since its beginnings in 1994, and involved numerous individuals and agencies\textsuperscript{30} with broad


\textsuperscript{29} Zürcher 474. The “Do no harm” – framework developed by Mary Anderson and her team as part of the Local Capacities for Peace project refers to the influx of resources as “resource transfers.” See Mary B. Anderson, \textit{Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace - or War} (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. This research lies largely at the foundations of the range of current approaches to peace and conflict sensitivity. Whereas “do no harm” is often understood in a limited way to mean literally only not doing any harm, there is much more to it as defined by Anderson, and as an approach to conflict sensitivity. For a closer discussion of the notion of peace and conflict sensitivity and “do no harm” see chapter two.

\textsuperscript{31} In the initial Local Capacities for Peace project 15 case studies were conducted in 14 conflict zones. Subsequently, 24 feedback workshops involving 20-40 persons were held in the field and headquarter locations of active agencies. By 1999, a total of some 1000 individuals had been directly involved in generating the project's ideas and findings. The project has been a collaborative effort from its inception and is still ongoing as a learning process. For the history of the project see "Do
experience of providing international assistance in conflict. The publication reporting the results of the LCP research contains a presentation of the lessons learned from experience of aid in conflict. It illustrates how in some cases aid has done harm and in others avoided doing harm and instead has been able to strengthen local capacities for peace. Anderson’s research subsequently evolved into an ongoing process of collaborative learning. The key lessons of the LCP project and Do No Harm process are in brief as follows:

- Assistance brought into a context becomes a part of the context: Organizations can be neutral, but aid is not. Assistance can contribute to a feeling of people in that context that outsiders are choosing winners and losers.

- All contexts are characterized and may be analyzed through two types of factors: Connectors and local capacities for peace, and dividers and sources of tension.

- Aid interacts with and has an impact on both dividers and connectors: Impacts can be negative especially if there is no in-depth analysis of the context or if there is a failure to link programming to existing analysis. Impacts can be positive, but usually only where analysis of dividers and connectors is used. A whole project is seldom to blame for negative impacts. It is the details of an intervention that determine its impact on peace/conflict.

- Actions and behaviors have consequences: Actions reflect effects of resources being brought by an organization into a context. This is also referred to as the effects of resource transfers. Behavior in turn reflects the conduct of the people bringing the resources. In other words, the content, style, and modes of aid communicate values. This is referred to as implicit ethical messages of aid.

- There are always options and opportunities: Experience has shown that projects can be changed and fine-tuned while keeping the goals intact; and admitting mistakes and making appropriate changes is appreciated by communities receiving aid.

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33 The LCP project identified five categories of peace capacities and connectors as 1) systems and institutions, 2) attitudes and actions, 3) shared values and interests, 4) common experiences, and 5) symbols and occasions. Likewise five categories were found for understanding the tensions and divisions in conflict and conflict-affected societies: 1) systems and institutions, 2) attitudes and actions, 3) different values and attitudes, 4) different experiences, 5) symbols and occasions. For a thorough discussion of these categories of connectors and dividers, see Anderson (1999) 24-33.
In essence, the idea of contextual knowing is also at the core of Anderson’s work. Whereas identifying connectors and dividers in an operational area is the suggested way of analyzing the immediate intervention context, looking to resource transfers and messages of aid is a way to bring about understanding of the interaction of aid with the context.\textsuperscript{34}

1.2.2 Finnish development policy and practice

As discussed above, this dissertation is linked further to a body of research and evaluations carried out on Finnish development policy and practice, in particular to studies related to the Finnish-Nepali aid relationship.\textsuperscript{35} Within this body of research, there is very little that has been published specifically on Finnish development aid in conflict or conflict-affected/fragile contexts. An exception to this is the research report by Hossain et al. on Development Co-operation for Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Policy Papers series of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Helsinki. Hossain and others conducted their study in 2006/2007 on the relationship between development cooperation and conflict prevention and resolution, looking to the implications of the conflict in Nepal for development assistance. The research was carried out as a case study of three Finnish funded projects to Nepal.\textsuperscript{36} The perspective of the analysis was one-way, focusing on the implications of conflict for aid, (but not vice-a-versa).

\textsuperscript{34} For the purpose of providing insights to and concepts with which to discuss interactions of aid and conflict pertaining to my doctoral research, I will present a somewhat closer review of the parts of Anderson’s research concerning resource transfers and implicit ethical messages in chapter two of this dissertation, in the section on peace and conflict sensitivity.


\textsuperscript{36} The projects studied were the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Support Project (RWSSSP) Phase III, Education for All (EFA) and Strengthening of Environmental Administration and Management – Nepal (SEAM – N). All three of the projects had commenced after the launch of what the report terms “the People’s War.”
Through their study, Hossain and others found “[t]he dilemma surrounding development assistance in a conflict-affected fragile state like Nepal [to be] aggravated by concerns related to aid fungibility, both at the national and local levels.” They saw the potential of the state to manipulate resources to fight a civil war and of the Maoists to misappropriate funds locally to be a reality of aid, and not merely hypothetical. Hossain et al. argue that both sides of the conflict had offended the spirit of development cooperation, and suggest that one of the overarching threats or conflict-related risks for development aid was that concerning diversion and leakage of funds. The conflict was further found to affect the studied interventions by causing delays in implementation, which in turn had caused rises in the cost of construction materials. Moreover, in the case of the basket funded intervention the study found monitoring to be challenged and of poor quality, and therefore suspected it to be likely that funds had fallen “into the hands of the Maoists.” Hossain et al. found that one of the solutions used in the studied interventions to overcome these challenges caused by the conflict, included emphasis on transparency in project work. This, they found, had ensured acceptance of the project by both sides of the conflict. Based on their comparison of the three cases (one of which was a contribution to a basket fund and two of which represented more traditional project type interventions) Hossain and others claim the more conventional forms of project type aid to be more viable in conflict situations. They maintain that project type interventions offer better prospects for utilizing and controlling the use of aid and provide fewer opportunities for funds to be siphoned off for other purposes.37

Finally, although not counting strictly as academic research, there are two evaluations commissioned by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland as well as one impact assessment carried out by a Kathmandu-based research and consultancy firm Interdisciplinary Analysts (IDA), which are relevant for the topic of my study, and thus worth briefly introducing here. The first is an evaluation on Finland’s Contribution to Building Inclusive Peace in Nepal, published in 2012. The second evaluation was published in 2014 under the title Peace and Development in Finland’s Development Cooperation. The third is a Beneficiary Impact Assessment of two development programs carried out in Nepal, dated to 2012. The first of these reports was a sub-evaluation complementing a broader Danish-led international evaluation on support to the Nepalese peace process during 2006-2011. The

purpose of the sub-evaluation was to assess the contribution that Finland had made toward a socially inclusive peacebuilding process in Nepal. The sub-evaluation reviewed Finland’s contribution to three programs in Nepal: the Nepal Peace Trust Fund, International IDEA and Alliance for Peace. Finland’s role in various peacebuilding committees and working groups was also reviewed. The evaluation found that Finland had used its peacebuilding funds cost-efficiently and strategically. This had been done by pooling funds with other donors to support a broad variety of implementing agencies and with expert advisory support from Finland. The complementarity of Finnish support to peacebuilding efforts in Nepal was found to be good, despite the fact that it had been carried out without any “comprehensive post-conflict assessment or a peacebuilding strategy by Finland.” Finland’s contributions relied solely on external analyses by the UN and the Utstein Group, which served to provide only broad guidelines for peacebuilding for all donors in various areas. The evaluation found these external analyses leaving Finnish contributions without “sufficient practical guidance in the changed post-conflict situation.” Furthermore, these general guidelines did not include a theory of change to guide the transformation sought in the supported programs, and the projects studied were found not to have carried out any kind of peace and conflict impact assessment either. Key recommendations of the sub-evaluation included strengthening post-conflict and peacebuilding analyses; creating sectorial guidelines for do-no-harm and peace and conflict assessments; harvesting and sharing best practices; building social cohesion strategies; developing change theories to guide transformation; analyzing and addressing systemic barriers; better implementation of the Nepalese government’s commitments on post-conflict needs of women; strengthening evidence-based monitoring with gender and socially disaggregated data; establishing accountability institutions; and improving the quality of participation.38

The second evaluation commissioned by the Finnish MFA looked more broadly, through four case studies (Western Balkans, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Palestinian Territories), to “draw lessons on how Finnish development cooperation supports peace and development in fragile states.”39 A further purpose of the evaluation was to identify how these lessons relate to the MFA’s newly compiled


39 Bennett and Fleming, Peace and Development in Finland’s Development Cooperation: Synthesis 3.
guidelines for working in fragile states\textsuperscript{40}, and how these guidelines might be applied in the future. Overall, the evaluation found Finland to have been strong in its coordination and predictability of funding, with a good mix of pooled funding for multilateral programs, and the pursuit of strong and consistent advocacy on gender and human rights issues across all four case studies. One of the key challenges with regard to advocacy was the provision of appropriate levels of staffing “in fragile states where stakeholders are [said to be] more responsive to the presence and continuity of international staff on the ground.” The evaluation further found Finland to have demonstrated across all four cases a strong adherence to aid efficiency and ensuring predictability and transparency. Also coordination with key counterpart ministries and the wider donor community was found to be very good; and Finland was found to have upheld its commitments toward on-budget support and to have followed donor harmonization principles in addition to consistently promoting national ownership. In addition to these generally positive findings, the evaluation found the value of development cooperation contributing to peace and security as varying from country to country due to the differing circumstances in each context. The evaluation further found there to be a complete lack of comprehensive studies combining contextual, political economy, poverty and conflict analyses to underpin a strategic approach to Finnish development programs and the rationale for chosen projects. This was said, at times, to have resulted in fragmented and overly ambitious portfolios in the studied case countries where the availability of sufficient resources and the complexity of the context had not always been realistically reflected in country plans and strategies. In seeking for complementarity, the evaluation found Finland to have largely relied upon contextual analyses conducted by other donors. One of the reflections of the evaluation was that Finland needs to develop indicators or evaluative measures recording progress toward higher level aspirations of statehood – otherwise the assumption that development cooperation correlates with peacebuilding cannot be upheld. The list of recommendations of the evaluation starts out with a call for conflict and political economy analyses to be conducted “in all fragile areas with substantial MFA Finland presence.” Other program/project level recommendations of the evaluation included the call to work closely with donor partners ensuring results planning and adequate monitoring is in place; to formulate theories of change for projects linking them to country strategies; to

\textsuperscript{40} Finland’s Development Policy and Development Cooperation in Fragile States - Guidelines for Strengthening Implementation of Development Cooperation.
update risk management analyses regularly; and where security prohibits access to recipient communities, to conduct a thorough appraisal of remote management.41

Lastly, in view of introducing the concept of armed violence prevention and reduction to Nepali government official and international agencies, the impact assessment conducted by the Kathmandu-based consultancy, Interdisciplinary Analysts, was carried out “to measure the extent to which a number of existing ‘development’ interventions – schemes that mitigate risk factors associated with violence onset – have (or have not) improved real and perceived security.”42 One of the two studied case projects of the assessment was the same Finnish funded Rural Village Water Resources Management Project that serves as the case study for my research.43 The assessment report explains that the key focus for the research team was to examine the interventions through the eyes of beneficiaries and wider community residents. A central aim of the study was to “better understand how [the case projects had] fulfilled their core objectives and contributed to wider forms of ‘social security’ and ‘violence prevention’.”44 While the assessment found both of the studied projects to have been effective in meeting their planned objectives, it also found that there had been unplanned positive outcomes in both interventions. The many positive by unanticipated outcomes of the RVWRMP project had induced changes among beneficiaries, their households as well as within the project area at large. These unplanned changes included improvements in health, hygiene and environment, and increase in the number of children’s enrollment in schools. The assessment found poverty, unemployment and lack of education to constitute major risk factors of armed violence in the areas of the studied projects. Easy availability of alcohol and drugs, political factionalism, shortage of agricultural land, lack of awareness regarding peaceful coexistence, and easy access of arms were further found to constitute context specific proximate risk factors of violence. Women were found to be particularly vulnerable to violence in the studied areas. The easy availability of alcohol was seen as a prime cause for this. On the other hand, the ending of the Maoist conflict, the education of women, changes in local perceptions after

41 Bennett and Fleming, Peace and Development in Finland’s Development Cooperation: Synthesis 10-16.
43 The closer inspection within the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project was also the same district of Achham and the same Village Development Committee (Bhatakatiya) as I had chosen to be the case-within-case of my study already at the turn of 2007/2008.
44 Ibid.
awareness trainings organized by the projects, the presence of saving and user groups in the communities, increased employment and incomes as well as the implementation of development projects were seen as significant in mitigating risk factors to armed violence. Although enhancing security was not the aim of either of the studied projects, the assessment found their development support to have led to improved safety and security as a consequence: “The development interventions under study have triggered many social processes which have influenced the mindscapes and behaviors of beneficiaries in unanticipated ways and one such is related with social security.” The study thus showed that by targeting key drivers of poverty, such as limited access to water and sanitation services or lack of education, the studied development interventions had been able to strengthen “social security” within the project areas. This in turn had been found to subsequently promote individual safety and security. The beneficiaries of the RVWRMP project in Bhatakatiya were found to highlight the fact that improvements in basic services had increased social security, which had ultimately improved physical security as well. Despite existing political differences in the community, the members of user committees had been able to jointly carry out different activities of the project, which in turn had slowly strengthened social cohesion among them. Furthermore, both case studies of the assessment had shown that membership in social groups had improved interpersonal skills and helped to reduce conflicts at individual and household levels, and ultimately to enhance social and physical security. The assessment report noted that the rise in perceived social and physical security could not be attributed to the studied interventions, and that it was difficult to directly attribute reduction in violence to specific development activities such as water and sanitation access. It concluded, nonetheless: “it seems…more likely that [the various impacts of the projects] contribute synergistically within a larger causal chain of interlinked drivers.” Over 75% of the beneficiaries of the RVWRMP in Bhatakatiya VDC were found to have perceived that implementation of the said development intervention had helped to reduce factors leading to armed violence in their area.45

45 Ibid.
1.3 Overview of dissertation

With this doctoral research project I set out to explore what is entailed in carrying out a development intervention in a context affected by conflict. The research is designed as an in-depth single case study of a Finnish-Nepali bilateral water and sanitation project carried out in Far Western Nepal during the years 2006 – 2010. My inquiry looks to whether or not and how it was that the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project (RVWRMP – referred to in this study as the project) came to take into consideration its conflict-affected operational context, and what (f)actors (events, actions, actors, guidelines etc.) contributed to or inhibited this.

The study is based on narrativity as a way of knowing. It aims to provide a bottom-up, grassroots perspective into development cooperation practice as a representation of the international by bringing the involved individuals to the fore as legitimate knowers in the sphere of International Relations (IR)\textsuperscript{46}. In doing so, I also respond with this study to a long-standing call in peace research to contribute to the emancipation of individuals at the grassroots: to enable their participation in research about their worlds.\textsuperscript{47} As such, by talking with, and listening to people, I aim with this research (borrowing from Molly Andrews) to “…understand the broader meaning of the stories they tell me…”\textsuperscript{48} Following from this, I approach the task set for the inquiry through a narrative analysis of the primary data collected for this study. I further scrutinize and discuss my findings with the help of a four-dimensional theoretical and conceptual framework based on the notions of defining interventions as working in, on or around conflict; peace and conflict sensitivity; risk management thinking; and intervention ethics.

The study shows how the conflict-affected context of the intended project was a major factor influencing the early design phase of the intervention. It also reveals

\textsuperscript{46} Examples of other works by Finnish IR scholars who have in their own ways brought the voices of individuals into IR are Eeva Puumala, "Corporeal Conjunctures No-w-here: Failed Asylum Seekers and the Senses of the International" (PhD diss., University of Tampere, School of Management, 2012); Elina Penttinen, "Corporeal Globalization: Narratives of Embodied Subjectivity and Otherness in the Sexscapes of Globalization" (PhD diss., University of Tampere, Department of Political Science and International Relations, 2004); Henri Vogt, Between Utopia and Disillusionment: A Narrative of the Political Transformation in Eastern Europe (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005).

\textsuperscript{47} Tarja Väyrynen, "Missä on kriittinen rauhantutkimus? Normaalitiete teen portinvartijat ja kriittiset marginalit,” in Maailman tutkimisesta ja muuttamisesta, ed. Unto Vesa (Tampere: Tampere Peace Research Institute, Tampere University, 2003) 133.

how despite ongoing tensions in the operational area, the proactive attention of the project toward its conflict-affected context diminished significantly after the project was started in October 2006, a month before the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Nepal. The study further describes how instabilities, tensions and various security incidents continued throughout the duration of the project, leading to a rise in security concerns toward the end of the project.

Viewed through the four lenses of the theoretical and conceptual framework, this research presents the studied project first as a case of working around and in conflict, despite the conflict. Secondly, the study reveals a primacy of “one-way-street” risk management thinking in the project. Thirdly, it defines the project as having been semisensitive to conflict and discloses some intuitive approaches of the project to working in a conflict-affected context. Fourth, this research exposes the intervention design based on a rigid participatory step-by-step process of water use master planning and the approach of gender equity and social inclusion as courses through which the project may be seen as having also in part worked on conflict. Finally, through a reflection of a framework of intervention ethics, this study discusses how the project largely held with principles of mutuality, impartiality, consistency, and universality; how it held with the principles of sustainability and complementarity in varying degrees during different stages of the project, and how it did not quite fully live up to the principles of accountability and reflexivity.

Following this introductory chapter, I will reveal the foundational points of departure for this study and present its theoretical and conceptual underpinnings in chapter two. This includes first a positioning of this study on a continuum of policy-oriented/problem-solving research and critical inquiry, followed by an explanation of two fundamental points of departure related to the connections between peace and development as well as aid interventions and their contexts. The chapter then sheds light on the shifts in development–security thinking, looking to the nexus debate and connections between peace, conflict, security and development. The discussion then focuses on the theme of aid and conflict and presents the notions of working in, on or around conflict; peace and conflict sensitivity; risk management thinking; and intervention ethics as central elements of the debate that are subsequently used as lenses through which to discuss the resulting narrative of the study in the final chapter.

Chapter three starts out by describing the research design and methodology of the study. It presents case study and narrativity as two essential elements on which
the study has been founded. The discussion that follows of the guidelines used for constructing a retrospective historical narrative also includes reflections on my research process. Next I give an overview of appreciative inquiry (AI) and its uses in research. This is followed with reflections on how I used the five AI principles of constructivism, simultaneity, poetics and inclusivity, anticipation, and focus on the positive in this study. These sections also contain reflections on my research process, shedding light in particular on the way in which AI influenced my interactions with research participants during interviews. An extensive and elaborate discussion on the research design, methodological choices and research process are justified with a further aim of this study, which is to bring forth a deeper understanding of the type of research process chosen for this study. The last half of chapter three includes discussions on positionality, scope and limitations of the study, as well as reflections on normativity and ethical concerns. These are followed by a description of the research data consulted for this study, and an explanation of the process of data collection, including a closer look to the interviews, being an outsider and working with an interpreter. Finally, the chapter ends with a description of data analysis, filling in the picture provided earlier in the chapter.

Chapter four offers a contextualization of the studied case project. As such, it has three dimensions: the policy context, country context and intervention context. The first of these consists of an examination of five main Finnish policy texts guiding development cooperation at the time of designing and implementation the studied case intervention. These include the security and defense policies from 2004 and 2009, the development policies from 2004 and 2007 and the text on development and security in Finland’s development policy from 2009. The discussion on the policy context ends with a reflective section on the presence of a (peace)-security-development nexus in the texts. I next discuss Nepal as a conflict-affected context for the studied case project, and provide an overview of the district of Achham and Bhatakatiya VDC, which was selected as the closer point of inspection of this study. The chapter ends with a description of the chosen case intervention, the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project, portrayed as an example of Finnish-Nepali bilateral development cooperation.

Chapters five, six and seven constitute the empirical story of the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project, as constructed through the process of narrative analysis. The story takes the form of a retrospective historical narrative, in which the three chapters are chronologically written. Chapter five describes the early planning and design phase of the project, and shows how the political
instabilities in Nepal had a significant (stalling) effect on project planning. It reveals a shift in argumentation concerning the choice of operational area, and shows how contextual instabilities and conflict were seen as something in need of special attention in project design and implementation. The chapter then narrates how go-ahead was granted by the Finnish MFA to proceed with the project despite ongoing turmoil. This was portrayed on the one hand as conscious risk-taking based on the experience of a former project in Lumbini carried out by Finns during the war, and on the other hand as a commitment to the Nepali people coupled with a realization that it does not help the conflict situation not to continue with development activities. The startup of the project was, however, stalled once again following the royal coup and subsequent escalation of the conflict.

Chapter six describes the implementation of the project in detail starting with its kick-off in October 2006 onwards. It explains how there was a sense of confidence and enthusiasm in the air among the project’s actors at the start of the intervention. It is here that the commitments made to conflict sensitivity and the Do No Harm approach, however, seem to slip away, disappear almost. Not only are they presented in the project’s paper trail in a fuzzy and undetermined way, but also the conflict is “felt to be over,” leading to a low overall prioritization on conflict themes in the project. Nonetheless, the challenges of local political pressures are felt intensely with regard e.g. to hiring decisions within the project: who gets chosen becomes a “bloody fierce negotiation.” The intervention design with a strong local presence of project actors, emphasis on full transparency, inclusion and a participatory step-by-step way of creating and implementing the plans for water use are found to be important smoothing factors in an otherwise challenging operational context. The chapter explicates how, despite a stabilized situation, there is an expectation in the project for disturbances to affect the implementation of the project. Yet the project seems to be carried out with a “business as usual” approach without consideration of the tense contextual realities. Toward the end of the project, contextual challenges see an increase, which leads to the establishment of an incident reporting system as well as various intuitive and ad hoc solutions through which to alleviate pressures toward the project. The Basic Operational Guideline document (a list of principles created and agreed on together by the international community in Nepal) and an anti-donation memo written by one of the project’s team leaders become instrumental tools for dealing with the local political pressures toward the project. The chapter comes toward a conclusion with its account of how these experiences lead to an explanation emerging within the project of its link to building peace. Yet, despite the rise in local manifestations of
the conflict at the end of the project, the plans remained unchanged without special consideration for the conflict-affected context.

Chapter seven elucidates the final phase of the project. It explains how the risks identified at the start of the intervention were still considered to be valid at completion, and how peace and security were defined as key components of sustainable development. It describes how the promotion of human rights, democracy and good governance were portrayed as preferred responses to the conflict-affected setting. The chapter further illuminates the importance of avoiding shortcuts as an important message of the project, highlighting learning gained through the gender equality and social inclusion approach, and pointing to poverty ranking as a particular cause of social conflict in the project framework. Finally, the chapter ends by noting that the link between development and peace was omitted from recommendations for future assistance in the project area.

The empirical findings of this research, presented as a retrospective narrative of the project in the preceding three chapters are coupled in chapter eight with the main operational themes and concepts of the theoretical framework presented in chapter two (working in, on or around conflict; peace and conflict sensitivity; risk management thinking; intervention ethics). This makes for a closer discussion of the results of this study (presented in brief at the top of this section), leading to some conclusions as to the contribution it makes to the academic discussion on aid and conflict, and secondarily to that concerning the research on Finnish foreign, security and development policy. I also discuss the possible implications this study has for practitioners (people and organizations) in the business of policy design as well as planning, implementing, evaluating, and funding development cooperation in conflict-affected contexts; and briefly revisit the research design in this concluding chapter. Finally, I make some preliminary suggestions for further research that this study gives rise to.
In this chapter I first discuss the basis on which the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study is composed and establish the boundaries of the literature reviewed. I then give an account of the shifts in security-development thinking, and proceed to focusing on the aid and conflict debate, which I identify as the most relevant for my study. The next four sections of the chapter (2.3 Working in, on or around conflict; 2.4 Peace and conflict sensitivity; 2.5 Risk management thinking; 2.6 Intervention ethics) form what might be called the operational concepts of the dissertation, which are later used as lenses through which I discuss the narrative in the final chapter of this research report. Finally, based on the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings thus presented, I formulate the more precise research questions of the study in the last section of this chapter.

2.1 A policy-oriented approach and two fundamental points of departure related to peace, development, interventions and context

In their introduction of the so-called liberal peacebuilding\(^49\) debate, Edward Newman, Roland Paris and Oliver P. Richmond present two main schools of thought. They call one a *critical approach* that casts doubt on assumptions of liberalism and state-building, and raises questions about existing institutions, policy assumptions and the various interests they serve, and also readily challenges these conventions. Underlying the critical approach is a concern that liberal

\(^{49}\) Liberal peacebuilding refers to post-Cold War operations that are reflective of the idea that maintaining peace in post-conflict societies demands multifaceted approaches with attention to a broad range of institutional, economic and social needs. They reflect a liberal project that seeks to build peace within and between states on basis of market economics and liberal democracy. See Edward Newman, Roland Paris and Oliver P. Richmond, *"New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding,"* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009) 7.
peacebuilding may have adverse consequences for politics and everyday life, or that it may be a mechanism of hegemony. It questions the assumption that a universal vision of conflicted or post-conflict situations is possible. While I do share many of these concerns of the critical approach, in particular the view of each conflicted situation as unique and thus calling for context specificity, the research design of this study comes closer to the second school of thought as presented by Newman and others. This second approach offers a critique revolving around the effectiveness of peacebuilding (and development). Here subjects concerning peacebuilding at large are approached in a problem-solving manner. The approach takes the prevailing social relationships as well as the institutions into which they are organized as a given framework of action. Newman et al. call this a policy-oriented approach, the aim of which is to improve the performance of certain actors within practical, legal or political parameters that are in a sense taken as a given in the “real world.” The aim of research through this approach is the generation of new policy-relevant insights.\(^{50}\) Despite my gravitation toward a policy-oriented, problem-solving approach with the design of this study, I aim simultaneously to be critical in my research in the sense suggested by Emeritus Professor of development studies, Juhani Koponen. He claims that the task of academically critical research is to challenge and contribute to prevailing knowledge and understandings, and to test the boundaries of and often un-disclosed assumptions behind current understandings.\(^{51}\) This study may further be seen as critical in the sense described by Professor of peace research Tarja Väyrynen, who claims that peace research may as such be seen as critical through its strong normative stance in favor of positive peace and peaceful transformation of conflicts.\(^{52}\)

\(^{50}\) Ibid. Juhani Koponen also discusses various approaches to development studies research in a similar way by asking what development studies can offer to praxis and how does it do so. He claims that all of development research should be relevant to development: it should be related to the problems in developing countries and global inequality and in some way help to understand these challenges. He then proceeds to making a distinction between basic and applied research, a dichotomy that others call respectively critical and problem-solving research. In the same way as Newman et al., Koponen understands critical research as referring to a more holistic situation analysis, whereas problem-solving research takes the situation as a given and aims to find a workable solution. The demand to be relevant to development is pertinent for both approaches. See Juhani Koponen, "Kehitysmaatutkimus - tieto ja toiminta," in Kehitysmaatutkimus: johto ja perusteet, eds. Juhani Koponen, Jari Lanki and Anna Kervinen (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2007) 18-19.

\(^{51}\) Ibid. I discuss my approach to being critical in research from the perspectives of reflexivity as a part of narrative inquiry and researcher positionality in chapter 3.

\(^{52}\) Väyrynen, Missä on kriittinen rauhantutkimus? Normaaliöiden portinvartijat ja kriittiset marginaalit 122.
With a research topic situated in the midst of disciplines ranging from peace and conflict research/conflict resolution to development studies and IR to development economics and beyond, the range of what might be considered the relevant body of literature to review in order to arrive at a view of what constitutes “prevailing knowledge and current understandings” is overwhelming in both scope and size. This is all the more so, due to the fact that the intersections between issues related conflict/resolution, development and security/peace/building have received an increasing amount of attention in the last decade and a half in both academic and policy debates.53 The policy-oriented approach of this study has served as one of my guides in limiting the otherwise far too vast reading list. This is not to say that I have specifically disregarded material that is “critical” in nature, but it is fair to say that the extent to which I delve deep into literature critiquing the entire international peacebuilding system or developmentalist complex, for instance, is limited.

This research project was guided at the outset by two basic points of departure that constitute the foundations of the theoretical and conceptual framework within which the study is situated. Coupled with the policy-oriented approach described above, these starting points also serve on their part to draw the implicit boundaries of the academic discussion in which I wish to take part with this dissertation. My first point of departure has been an understanding of peace and development as interrelated processes. The background to this is a deep-seated belief of a peace and conflict studies scholar and development practitioner in the notions of positive and negative peace. As opposed to negative peace, which entails only the absence or cessation of direct (physical) violence, positive peace includes overcoming of structural and cultural violence as well, and thus signifies just, fair and equal

structures in society – features often sought through processes of development. A second and related starting point has been an understanding of development interventions as inevitably being in interaction with the dynamics of their operational settings, also outside their immediate and intended scope. In other words, I understand development interventions as not only having an effect on the dynamics of their operational settings, but also that they are affected by that same dynamic. While I have not assumed that development cooperation as such would (necessarily) cause conflict, I do believe that development interventions affect the social, political and economic dynamics of the conflict-affected settings in which they operate. This second point has its origins in my former training and professional role as a conflict sensitivity trainer and peace advisor for the development NGO sector – and as such, a shared unease about the ethics of outsider interventions, as voiced by Mary B. Anderson:

Who do we think we are? Is it justified for outsiders to choose among people or institutions, to make judgments about who or what is ‘truly’ a local capacity for peace? To what extent might our attempts to do so constitute dangerous and inappropriate social engineering? … The fact that aid inevitably does have an impact on warfare means aid workers cannot avoid the responsibility of trying to shape that impact. The fact that choices about

54 Johan Galtung, Peace with Peaceful Means: Peace Research in a Changing World (Oslo: SAGE Publications with International Peace Research Institute PRIO, 1991) 31. A related idea is Galtung’s distinction between direct violence (children are murdered), structural violence (children die through poverty) and cultural violence (whatever blinds us to this or seeks to justify the death of children). In this line of thinking, direct violence can be ended by changing conflict behavior, structural violence by removing structural injustices and contradictions, and cultural violence by changing attitudes. See e.g. Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall, Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011) 10-12. For a discussion on the need for recognition and definition of latent and manifested violence, see also Reychler and Langer 17.

55 I use the term intervention interchangeably with development aid and development cooperation, and understand it as a combination of definitions by Laue and Koponen & Seppänen. Laue sees an intervention as occurring “...when an outside or semi-outside party self-consciously enters into a ... situation with the objective of influencing [it] in a direction the intervener defines as desirable” Ref. Cheldelin, Druckman and Fast, Conflict: From Analysis to Intervention 189-190. Koponen et al. in turn explain that from a developmentalist perspective development cooperation and development aid may be understood as a planned development intervention, the aim of which is to achieve positive change in a certain time and place with a certain contribution of resources. The objective of transferring resources is to enhance the development of its recipients, in whichever way it is defined in international developmentalist discourse in any given time. See Koponen and Seppänen, Kehitysyhteistyön monet kasvot 338-339.

how to shape that impact represent outsider interference means that aid workers can always be accused of inappropriate action. There is no way out of this dilemma.\textsuperscript{57}

Within the parameters described above, the aim of this chapter is to share with my readers the central conceptual and thematic underpinnings of this study. I will attempt to do this by first elucidating the themes mentioned above through an overview\textsuperscript{58} of corresponding research and practitioner debates\textsuperscript{59}. I will then focus the discussion on four elements (working in, on and around conflict; peace and conflict sensitivity; risk management thinking; and intervention ethics) within the theme of aid and conflict, which in itself constitutes a particular strand within the broader debate on the conflict-development nexus and the contribution of development to peacebuilding.\textsuperscript{60} It is with the help of this conceptual apparatus and terminology that I will later discuss the findings of my research in chapter eight.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. 146.


\textsuperscript{59} It should be mentioned, that a large part of my theoretical and conceptual understanding of the research topic at hand has its basis also within the ongoing Finnish and international foreign and security and development policy processes concerning the themes of peace, security, development and fragility. The policy context(s) of this study will be discussed separately below in chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{60} A case could be made for including perspectives into this framework also e.g. from current security and strategic studies such as research on comprehensive crisis management or the whole of government approach, as well as to further broaden the theoretical framework with insights from the vast body of research on peacebuilding. Interesting work is currently also being done on systems thinking in relation to peacebuilding and development, which could be seen as relevant for my research topic. See e.g. Diana Chigas and Peter Woodrow, "Systems Thinking in Peacebuilding Evaluations: Applications in Ghana, Guinea-Bissau and Kosovo," in Evaluation Methodologies for Aid in Conflict, eds. Ole Winckler Andersen, Beate Bull and Megan Kennedy-Chouane (Oxford: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2014). With the aim of shedding light through this project in particular on the interactions of development interventions and their conflict-affected contexts, and in order to keep the conceptual framework manageable, I have deemed it necessary to focus on the specific theme of aid in conflict within the broader discussion of the conflict-development nexus. Even within this debate, choices have had to be made so as to limit the breadth of inspection. A key boundary in this latter sense arises from the policy- and practice-oriented approach of this study.
2.2 Shifting Security – Development Thinking

The understanding of issues and processes concerning peace and development as intertwined derives largely from what has been coined in research literature as a shift in development thinking. According to Peter Uvin, the development field spent its first three decades in total agnosticism towards matters of conflict and insecurity. “When violent conflict occurred, it was treated as an unfortunate occurrence, forcing development workers out and humanitarian workers in – an order to be reversed when the conflict was over and conditions were safe for normal development work to resume.” Human rights violations, social polarization, inter-group resentment, intolerance, extremism and other dynamics commonly leading to and part of conflict were simply not considered to be part of the development mandate.61

The ending of the Cold War brought on a new optimism, opening up unexplored possibilities in responding to questions of peace, security and development. The momentum was captured in UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s *Agenda for Peace* document in 1992, outlining an approach combining conflict prevention diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding62. A core idea of the supplement to the Agenda for Peace document that followed in 1995 was that only sustained efforts to resolve underlying socio-economic, cultural and humanitarian issues could help to achieve durable peace.63 The guideline document on *Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation,*64 set forth in a Policy Statement by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC)65 of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1997

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65 The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) became part of the OECD by Ministerial Resolution on 23 July 1961. It is an international forum of many of the largest funders of aid, including 29 DAC Members. The World Bank, IMF and UNDP participate as observers. See "Development Assistance Committee (DAC)," OECD, [http://www.oecd.org/dac/developmentassistancecommittee dac.htm](http://www.oecd.org/dac/developmentassistancecommittee dac.htm) (accessed 06/02, 2015).
revealed the considerable change in development thinking and practice that was taking shape. It gave priority to areas formerly largely disregarded by the development agenda. Central to the rationale of the DAC was the acknowledgment that development cooperation must play a role in conflict prevention and building peace alongside the other instruments used by the international community: economic, social, legal, environmental and military.\textsuperscript{66} The guideline document explored how official development assistance (ODA) could pro-actively contribute to conflict prevention, post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction, and peacebuilding. Further, the document suggested that coherent and coordinated responses that explicitly address root causes of conflicts have the potential to make a long-term positive impact on preventing and alleviating violent conflict. Since the publication of this DAC guideline document almost two decades ago, the OECD has produced a steady stream of papers, policies and processes emphasizing the inter-relationship between peacebuilding and development\textsuperscript{67}. Also several donors have been seeking out ways to integrate conflict prevention/peacebuilding objectives and strategies into the range of ODA instruments at their disposal. In doing so, they have developed and to some extent employed a number of tools, approaches and frameworks, which has in part led to policy and institutional changes aiming to assist in mainstreaming a conflict prevention aspect into development activities.\textsuperscript{68}

Since the publishing of the \textit{Agenda for Peace} in 1992, the importance of preventive action and the links between development and security as forming an important foundation to international policy and norms have been commonly stressed in several subsequent UN documents and resolutions\textsuperscript{69} as well as by the

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\textsuperscript{66}Uvin, \textit{The Development/Peacebuilding Nexus: A Typology and History of Changing Paradigms} 9.


\textsuperscript{69}The link between development and security has been established prominently e.g. in UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s report United Nations, \textit{In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All} (New York: United Nations, Department of Public Information, 2005). The notion of larger freedom encapsulates the idea that development, security and human rights are all imperative and that they go hand in hand, reinforcing each other. Accordingly, the report states: “we will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we
World Bank\textsuperscript{70}, and regional and subregional actors such as the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community of West African States, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe as well as the European Union.\textsuperscript{71} The emphasis on themes of conflict and peace has strengthened remarkably also within various EU documents in which there is also now an ever-clearer inter-linkage of development and security political aspects in addition to the more traditional trade and aid approach.\textsuperscript{72}

Eleanor O’Gorman explains how the period between 1990-2010 “[brought] us through the troubled and failed humanitarian interventions of the early 1990s in Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia to the statebuilding ambitions of armed interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.” She goes on to claim that two particular political trends have defined current understandings of and responses to international conflict. First is the changing nature of conflict from inter-state to intra-state, a trend that has revolved around debates on the nature of “new wars” and the emergence of the “liberal peace thesis” as a guide to international responses informing increasingly comprehensive peace operations\textsuperscript{73}. The second trend is that related to


\textsuperscript{71} For a broader discussion of the adoption of conflict prevention by international organizations, see e.g. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, \textit{Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts} 138-142; See also Raimo Väyrynen, "Challenges to Preventive Action," in \textit{Developing a Culture of Conflict Prevention}, Anna Lindh Programme on Conflict Prevention, ed. Anders Mellbourn (Hedemora: Gidlund, 2004) 91- 100; and Alice Ackermann. "The Idea and Practice of Conflict Prevention," \textit{Journal of Peace Research} 40, no. 3 (2003) 339-347. According to Ramsbotham et al. the European Union has perhaps made the deepest commitment to conflict prevention of any international organization. Prevention became a priority for the Council and the Commission and an organizing framework for many EU policies, among them the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the European Security and Defence Policy as well as the Union’s development policies. For a concise, yet well covered discussion of aid policies and architecture of international conflict and development, see O’Gorman, \textit{Conflict and development} 66-91.

\textsuperscript{72} See e.g. The EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts, Gothenburg European Council, June 2001 and The European Consensus on Development, Joint statement by the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission, 1482/05 DG E II.

\textsuperscript{73} Comprehensive peace operations are here referred to as spanning diplomatic, humanitarian, peacekeeping, rule of law, as well as development interventions. The notions and norms of
the changed global context of violent conflict that has been altered by concerns of terrorism and so-called failed or fragile states. Linked to fragility, most recently, has been the notion of resilience. O’Gorman maintains that the question of underdevelopment has in and of itself become a threat to international security in this debate. She continues by writing that this has been the driving force behind new variations of the relationship between development and military security—“captured by current preoccupations with stabilization and the peacebuilding/statebuilding nexus as the template for preventing and recovering from contemporary violent conflict.”

During the 1990s, humanitarian and development agencies mandated to tackle both the causes and effects of poverty and underdevelopment began to explore the link between development and violent conflict. O’Gorman defines three main arguments determining the increased interest among development organizations in seeing a more significant relationship between conflict and development. The first has centered on violent conflict as an impediment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. This led to the motivation of development agencies, NGOs and governments to protect development gains and become interested in questions concerning conflict in their strategies, funding and programs.

“humanitarian intervention” and “responsibility to protect” are part of these debates and serve as guides to action. See O’Gorman 4-5.

There is an expanding body of research and policy texts on the topic of fragility and to a growing extent also on the theme of resilience. I understand the debates on these themes as (somewhat messy and even contested) strands within the broader nexus debate that would require a longer discussion and much clarification in order to be useful as analytical concepts for research. In this dissertation I therefore take note of fragility and resilience as current and increasingly popular policy terminology, but refer to them mainly as part of the broader discussion concerning the nexus of peace, conflict, security and development. See e.g. Simon Levine et al., The Relevance of ‘Resilience?’ (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2012) 1-4; Naudé, Santos Paulino and McGillivray, Fragile States: Causes, Costs, and Responses xvii, 213; Bertoli and Ticci, A Fragile Guideline to Development Assistance 211-230; Seth D. Kaplan, Fixing Fragile States: A New Paradigm for Development (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Security International, 2008) 215; Finland’s Development Policy and Development Cooperation in Fragile States - Guidelines for Strengthening Implementation of Development Cooperation; OECD, International Engagement in Fragile States: Can’t we do better? (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2011) 60; OECD, States of Fragility 2015: Meeting Post-2015 Ambitions (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2015) 120.


O’Gorman 13.
The second argument arises from the Do No Harm principle, which goes beyond protecting development gains, and highlights the responsibility of development and aid actors “not to cause, enable or exacerbate violent conflict through their policies and programmes.” The principle took shape through a long-standing disquiet about third-party intervention among aid workers and others involved in the fields of development and humanitarian aid. This concern led to an upsurge of studies on aid in conflict. Research conducted particularly in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda clearly showed that relief and development initiatives can have an impact on and be influenced by the conflict dynamics within which they operate. Highlighted in the debate at the time were the negative effects that aid can have in conflict situations; the study of reactive approaches to conflict; and the need for sustainable development.

The third argument for the increased attention toward the conflict-development relationship, as presented by O’Gorman, was that development came to be seen as a suitable way to address the underlying, or root causes of violent conflict, often defined as poverty, social injustice, or group/ethnic relations and tensions. In this argument development was seen as an answer to long-term conflict resolution as it addressed many of the structural issues of state, society and economy underpinning violent conflict. O’Gorman takes note, however, that such presumptions of a causal relationship between development and conflict reduction are not accepted by all, and instead contested.

Apart from the argumentation described by O’Gorman, a further reason that has led to seeing a connection between development and conflict has been that related to the tremendous costs of war and post-conflict reconstruction. In comparison, development cooperation also started to be seen increasingly as a cost-effective way of conflict prevention. Through all of these factors combined

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78 O’Gorman 14. The do no harm principle has been discussed above in the introduction chapter in the section on previous research and will be discussed again later in this chapter in the section on peace and conflict sensitivity.
79 Ramsbotham et al. claim that there has always been a sense of unease about third-party intervention also in the conflict resolution field, since its beginnings.
80 Paffenholz, Peace and Conflict Sensitivity in International Cooperation: An Introductory Overview 65-66; See also Reychler and Paffenholz, Peacebuilding: A Field Guide.
81 Leonhardt, The Challenge of Linking Aid and Peacebuilding 239.
82 O’Gorman 14-15.
83 Ibid. For a discussion of comparative costs of preventive aid and post-conflict reconstruction, see Michael S. Lund, Preventing Violent Conflicts: Conflict-Sensitive Development in the 21st Century. (Washington, D.C.: Social Development Department, World Bank, 2004) 24; See also Reychler and
has emerged a growing consensus around the idea that development aid should foster economically as well as socially sustainable structures, and that conflict prevention should be seen as an overarching objective of development strategies that include economic, social, political, and environmentally sound development. Or as Uvin puts it, the nexus between conflict, development and peace has become widely accepted as an important aspect of development thinking and practice. For development actors this has meant having to go beyond “business as usual” and dealing with the political implications of aid in conflict-prone contexts. For diplomats and political actors it has meant having to learn how to “do development” and understand the importance of aid and its modalities in supporting long-term peace and stability.

2.2.1 Connections between peace, conflict, security and development – (why) does the nexus matter?

The relationships between peace, conflict, development and security have academic roots within a range of disciplines, such as peace and conflict studies, strategic/security studies and development studies. Since the late 1990s, there has been an expanding body of research in a variety of these fields on the interconnections between peace, conflict, security and development. This 

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Langer, Researching Peace Building Architecture 18; and Luc Reychler, "From conflict to sustainable peacebuilding: concepts and analytical tools," in Peacebuilding: A Field Guide, eds. Luc Reychler and Thania Paffenholz (Boulder Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001) 3-4. According to Reychler, the costs and the difficulty of managing conflict and violence increase significantly when a conflict crosses the threshold of violence, as violence tends to become the cause of more violence. The costs of violent conflict are not only those related to humanitarian aid and material reconstruction. Included are also psychological, spiritual, cultural, social, ecological and political costs.

84 Uvin 5.

85 O'Gorman 15-16.

86 See e.g. Hurwitz & Peake (2004), Duffield (2010), Hettne (2010), Stern & Öjendal (2010, 2011), Reid-Henry (2011), Amer, Swain & Öjendal (2012), Stilhoff Sørensen & Söderbaum (2012). Hettne and Amer et al. and Reid-Henry point out that although there may not have been explicit discussion of a nexus throughout the history of the concepts of development and security, the interrelationship is not new as such. For a discussion of the tensions of ideas surrounding the relationships between peace, conflict and development in various disciplines, see O'Gorman, 9-13. O'Gorman writes: “One would…presume a natural fusion of theory and application, given the urgency of the subject matter. Yet academic-practitioner relations are at best wary and fuelled by mutual suspicion or, at worst, mutually dismissive. And among academics there are enduring differences about the role that theorists and researchers should play in engaging with policy makers and practitioners. Some believe
research is most often referred to either as the “security-development” or “conflict-development” nexus.87

Ramses Amer, Ashok Swain and Joakim Öjendal, the editors of The Security-Development Nexus: Peace, Conflict and Development note that reflections on the relations between development and security became unavoidable following a flurry of post-Cold War “new conflicts” and a decade dominated by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, continuing violence and instability in the African development context as well as the relatively unstable peace (but successful development) context in East Asia. The notion of a development-security nexus emerged in both policy documents and academic circles, and became a “hotly contested concept.” Whereas the policy world was “jumping to ‘new solutions’...with reductionist conclusions” Amer et al. write that research remained skeptical. They claim the nexus soon became “a commodity over which intellectual ownership was as unclear as important” and say, “the idea is struggling with credibility.”88 Juhani Koponen in turn explains that the notion of a security-development nexus can be viewed as a “neat and tidy expression of the widespread feeling that security is becoming an integral part of development, and vice versa.”89 While some see it as self-evident that there can be no development without security and no security without development, others have been openly critical of the supposedly good intentions of the concept. Those representing a critical stand have pointed out that recent political priorities emphasizing the nexus have led to the securitization of development policy90 and to wealthy countries91 allocating large shares of their aid

the role of theorists is to interpret the world, not change it, while others support getting involved to the point of empowering particular groups and shaping policies.”


90 Koponen makes a note in passing of this happening the other way too, calling it “developmentalization of security.” (Ibid.) For a discussion on the development-security nexus approached through a vantage point of developmentalization of security, see e.g. Pupavac (2012).
to areas considered a risk to their security interests. Others yet have criticized the notion for its lack of clarity, claiming the idea of a security-development nexus has led to conceptual chaos. In the words of Maria Stern and Joakim Öjendal “[u]nderstanding, responding to or enacting a security-development nexus…promises to be a daunting project.” Most seem to agree, however, that the security-development nexus is “strong and inexorable.” Whichever stand one takes, Stern and Öjendal argue “the nexus matters.” Why? Because the interlinkages between peace, conflict, development and security have already become a focus of attention – and increasingly so – in both national and global policymaking. The notion seems to have provided a possible framework for policies designed to address current, and often complex policy challenges. Moreover, “an ever-growing amount of economic resources and political will is being poured into the ‘security-development nexus’ and the attendant revamping of national and multilateral institutions and actions designed to address it. Hence, ‘the nexus’ matters.”

Amer et al. however warn of the predicament concerning the nexus as being even more complex. Whose security and whose development is the nexus we speak...
of primarily concerned with, they inquire. Much in line with the critical voices speaking of securitization they also point out that in discussing the nexus, short-term security considerations of the rich and powerful increasingly dominate over the long-term developmental challenges of poor regions. This, they claim, poses a challenge for long-term engagement deemed necessary for sustainable peace. Furthermore, as do several of the other writers on the topic of the security-development nexus mentioned here, Amer et al. make note of coordination gaps between various aid agencies and their policies in connecting security and development. In addition to this they argue, "the [national and international] policies driven by the nexus approach...suffer from a huge disparity between policy and implementation, an absence of real local involvement, and a scarcity of resources."

It may be justified to ask whether the notion of a peace/security-development nexus is not in fact causing more confusion than clarity. A group of Swedish and British scholars interested in rethinking the nexus and concerned with what they label as “disastrous [e]ffects of the current radicalization of external intervention and disaster management” suggest in a special edition of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation’s publication Development Dialogue, The End of the Development-Security Nexus? The Rise of Global Disaster Management that it may indeed be time to turn the leaf in the debate. The editors, Jens Stilhoff Sörensen and Fredrik Söderbaum, write:

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98 See also e.g. Paffenholz (2009) 280-281; and Botes (2003) 285, who, in his discussion on post-conflict, postwar reconstruction claims in general that “the friction between theory and practice, between concept and achievement, runs through [also] much of the literature on social conflict, and is without a doubt where the challenges for post-conflict peace-building efforts lie in this century.”


100 By the same token Bertoli and Ticci (2012) maintain that the concept of fragility – despite having gained increasing relevance in development discourse in recent years – remains a “fuzzy and elusive” concept. They claim that the limited consensus that may be found in the literature on fragility suggests that “the analytical salience and the direct operational value-added of the concept remain unclear.” They note, however, that the state fragility debate has played an important advocacy role, and has offered methodological insights to the challenges faced by donors, as well as to what can realistically be achieved with external engagement.
The new landscape of development and security that has emerged in the 21st century is reflected in concepts such as ‘the development-security nexus’, referring to the merger of development and security and indicating that development has become integral to security; ‘failed’ and ‘fragile states’, emphasising the lack of state capacity to uphold order and implement policy; ‘human security’ and ‘humanitarian intervention’, both indicating a shifting referent of security from ‘state’ to ‘population’. These concepts all reflect a more radical interventionist approach since the early 1990s and a new condition in international relations, between centre and periphery.101

Stilhoff Sörensen et al. claim that a gradual shift is now taking place among scholars beyond the development-security nexus. They portray this as both a conceptual drift as well as a discursive shift, moving us toward a new terrain in which the “nexus” between development and security as we now know it (largely through the notion of fragility) will have been abandoned completely. This is happening, they say, through a process of development becoming non-material “sustainable development” and security losing ground to the notion of resilience. Julian Reid has coined this as a move away from the old nexus between development and security toward a new one between sustainable development and resilience. The critique in this is that building resilient subjects presupposes a disastrous world, one of constant global disaster management and interventions. Reid claims that a new form of subjectivity is thus emerging, one that needs to be flexible, adaptive and resilient in the face of change and disaster alike.102 It is here that risk management thinking takes a prominent spot in the broader nexus debate.


According to Thania Paffenholz, most of the research revolving around the conflict-development nexus can be seen as a response to, or an analysis of, the practitioner debate, or existing research has been reinterpreted from the perspective of this nexus. In her text on understanding the conflict-development nexus and the contribution of development cooperation to peacebuilding, she presents the research debate as being divided into four categories. The first of these comprises of meta-studies on the transformative nature of conflict and its meaning for development. The second body of research is composed of econometric studies examining quantitative macro-comparative variables to determine the influence of conflict on development and vice versa. The third body of literature covers inductive, qualitative area studies that try to identify patterns of causality between development and conflict. And finally, the fourth type of research, as described by Paffenholz, is reflective in nature, and is focused on analyzing people in developing countries and their reasons for participating or acting within armed conflict situations. Paffenholz notes with regret that only few attempts have been made to merge these different research approaches together, and claims further, “the transfer of the different research debates into policy is extremely selective.” In her article, she then proceeds to bringing the debates closer together by identifying themes that are discussed throughout the four research categories defined earlier. Through this exercise she arrives at ten themes that span across the four categories: 1) modernization, globalization, and the transformation of societies as a source of conflict; 2) economic growth, income, and conflict; 3) poverty and conflict; 4) inequality and conflict; 5) resources and conflict; 6) environmental security; 7) the “war economy” debate; 8) demography and conflict; 9) education and conflict; and 10) aid and conflict. The last of these is the most central to this study and provides for an additional way in which to draw the boundaries of the relevant literature reviewed for the construction of the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

In the past few decades since the Rwandan genocide, debates about conflict, peace, and development have intensified and developed into various directions. In her review of the practitioner debate concerning the conflict-development nexus, Paffenholz explains how the early exchanges centered on the prevention of other

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Paffenholz, Understanding the Conflict-Development Nexus and the Contribution of Development Cooperation to Peacebuilding 272-278.
situations like Rwanda from happening, turning the early warning discourse into somewhat of an industry. After the realization that the primary problem was a lack of political will to engage in early action, and not lack of information, the early warning industry lost its momentum. Paffenholz claims the early warning debate was thus absorbed into the general debate about prevention, culminating in the UN Secretary General’s 2001 report on Preventing Armed Conflict.  

The discourse continued with a focus on reducing the negative effects of aid on conflict, which was manifested in the so-called Do No Harm debate based on the research work by Mary B. Anderson. According to Paffenholz, the early reflections in the mid-1990s on the issue of aid and conflict evolved in three directions. The first addressed the need to gain a better understanding of the nature and functioning of armed conflict. This, she claims, marked a starting point for the coming together of the peace and development communities: development actors needed conflict analysis, which led to the introduction of analytical approaches from the field of conflict analysis, transformed into user-friendly toolboxes. A new conflict/development community started to grow with conflict units being established on the side of donor organizations, many of which have been represented in the Conflict Prevention and Development Cooperation Network of the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee. Also other networks, reference groups and communities of practice have since emerged, bringing

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104 Ibid.
105 Anderson, Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace - or War. “Do no harm” will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter in the section on peace and conflict sensitivity.
106 One of the toolboxes pointed to by Paffenholz is Simon Fisher et al., Working with Conflict: Skills and Strategies for Action (London: Zed Books in association with Responding to Conflict, 2000) This book is the result of work by several practitioners from around the world and coordinated by Responding to Conflict, RTC.
107 Paffenholz, Understanding the Conflict-Development Nexus and the Contribution of Development Cooperation to Peacebuilding 279. The OECD network mentioned by Paffenholz is currently called the International Network for Conflict and Fragility. See "The International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF)," OECD/DAC, [http://www.oecd.org/dac/governance-peace/conflictandfragility/theinternationalnetworkonconflictandfragility.htm](http://www.oecd.org/dac/governance-peace/conflictandfragility/theinternationalnetworkonconflictandfragility.htm) (accessed 06/26, 2015). The Finnish MFA does not have a separate conflict unit, but has been represented in the former OECD Conflict Prevention and Development Cooperation Network and current INCAF network by individually nominated ministry officials. Instead of a conflict unit, the Finnish MFA has had an ad hoc, information sharing intra-ministry working group on development and security since the mid 2000s. In addition to this Finland has a formal Strategic Coordination Group for Crisis Management with cross-sectorial representation from the several ministries, which was established following the recommendation of the Comprehensive Crisis Management Strategy in 2010. (Personal communication with Tanja Viikki, MFA 26.6.2015).
together scholars and practitioners working with various aspects of the peace, conflict, security and development nexus.108

The second direction into which the initial considerations on aid and conflict evolved, were studies that examined the consequences of armed conflict in particular with regard to security aspects such as the issue of landmines or disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants. This part of the practitioner debate, claims Paffenholz, has meanwhile been absorbed into the discourse on human security. The notion of human security in turn had found its way into research from the practitioner discourse where it was first mentioned in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report. There is also now a growing body of research related to human security, either proposing a narrow understanding of the concept by focus on violent threats or supporting a wider understanding of security by taking into account the cultural, social and structural context of human insecurity and society’s ability to counter it.109

The third direction of reflections on aid and conflict, and key in terms of this study, focused on the role of development with regard to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Referring to Paul Collier and others’ 2003 publication Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy, Paffenholz writes that development actors initially claimed that measures for poverty reduction and therefore almost all development activities per se are a contribution to peacebuilding in the long run.110 Michael S. Lund has argued in similar fashion in a 2004 study for the World Bank:

108 In addition to the working and coordination groups mentioned in the previous footnote, examples of such networks in Finland include small, nationally based working groups such as the development and conflict group initiated by the NGO Conflict Prevention Network KATU in the early 2000s and currently coordinated by the Finnish Development NGO Platform Kehys as the development and security -working group. Examples of networks coordinated by multilateral organizations include the UN Peace and Development Advisers’ Community of Practice as well as the international reference group for developing a conflict sensitivity e-learning platform for UN organizations. (Anisa Doty, personal involvement). See also: Stilhoff Sörensfall and Söderbaum, The End of the Development-Security Nexus? The Rise of Global Disaster Management.

109 Paffenholz, Understanding the Conflict-Development Nexus and the Contribution of Development Cooperation to Peacebuilding 279.

110 Ibid. 280. This is a point discussed by other authors as well. Jonathan Goodhand for instance has noted in reference to his research on Afghanistan that during the late 1990s donors through the Strategic Framework process increasingly saw aid as an instrument for building peace. See Jonathan Goodhand, "Aiding Violence or Building Peace? The Role of International Aid in Afghanistan," Third World Quarterly 23, no. 5 (2002) 840. See also; Zürcher, Conflict, State Fragility and Aid Effectiveness: Insights from Afghanistan 461-480.
The view that economic or other development assistance programs are already by their very aims and consequences conflict-preventive and that no adaptations are required is quite common in the development field.

Jonathan Goodhand has explained the early debate on this point as having diverged between “maximalist” and “minimalist” views. While the maximalists argued that aid should consciously be used as an instrument for building peace, the (mostly humanitarian) minimalists questioned the broadening of aid’s mandate in this way. They saw this as inevitably leading to the distortion of humanitarian principles and mandates, in particular those concerning impartiality and neutrality. In reflection of his research in Afghanistan, Goodhand concludes “[i]t might be argued that donor governments, in expecting aid instruments to support peace building processes…are expecting a child to do the job of an adult.” The perspective that all development activities constitute a contribution toward building peace was later renounced as it became evident that poverty reduction alone does not automatically lead to more peaceful societies.

In James K. Boyce’s words:

War-torn societies embarked on the fragile transition from violent conflict to a durable peace face enormous economic, social, and political challenges. In attempting to support this transition, the international community often provides substantial amounts of external assistance. This assistance can play an important and constructive role in meeting pressing social needs and building a durable peace, but it would be naïve to assume either that positive effects are the automatic result of good intentions or that donors are motivated entirely by the objective of peace-building.

In the past few decades policy level actors (bi- and multilateral donors and in some cases also international and national advocacy NGOs) have used a variety of strategies to link aid to conflict and peacebuilding. Thania Paffenholz names five such tactics as conditionality, negotiated benchmarks, bottom lines, and policy dialogue, as well as international networks in relation to war economies.

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111 Lund, Preventing Violent Conflicts: Conflict-Sensitive Development in the 21st Century. 34
112 Goodhand, Aiding Violence or Building Peace? The Role of International Aid in Afghanistan 840.
113 Paffenholz, Understanding the Conflict-Development Nexus and the Contribution of Development Cooperation to Peacebuilding 280.
Conditionality refers to laying down certain conditions under which aid will be provided. The objective is to influence the conflict situation through defined conditions e.g. by preventing an actor from continuing violent conflict or human rights violations by reducing or stopping aid resources and linking their restart to named political conditions. Negotiated benchmarks in turn operate on the basis of positive incentives: “for example, more aid will be provided if certain conditions in the country improve.” Paffenholz gives an example of this from Nepal where the donor community had made it clear to the government/king that budgetary support would be increased only if major democratic institutions such as the parliament were reactivated. The “bottom line” strategy entails defining the end of donor engagement. An example of this would be donors stating that if the situation does not improve in a certain way by a set deadline, engagement with the country will be ceased. Policy dialogue refers to long-term engagement between donors and partner countries. The aim behind dialogue processes is to be able to influence policies in a desired, constructive direction. Finally, international networks against war economies try to eliminate conflicting parties’ resource base through control of markets. Examples of this include the Kimberly process for banning war diamonds, and efforts to make oil revenue in conflict affected countries transparent or to create alternatives to opium production and drug trade in Afghanistan and Columbia. Paffenholz concludes by remarking that apart from the last strategy, all of these policy measures to affect conflict dynamics and/or peacebuilding are based on the assumption that aid and international reputation are treasured capital that conflicting parties are not willing to lose. For this reason, most of these measures can only have an effect if the recipient partner country is donor dependent. The policy level of international engagement with conflict countries also has its repercussions on the relations between donors and partners. Donors may be challenged by questions related to their engagement and

115 For a discussion of the notion of peace conditionality, see Ibid. Boyce claims that peace conditionality moves beyond all-or-nothing choices typical of post peace accord aid pledges where the signing of the accord is made the key to unlocking donor contributions altogether, and where the aid tap is either “on” or “off.” Peace conditionality seeks instead to calibrate the flow of support to the peace process by tying specific aid agreements to specific steps to build peace.

cooperation with non-state armed actors, and their relations to governments that are parties to conflict.\(^\text{117}\)

Current common knowledge among the international aid community on the subject of aid in conflict holds that under certain conditions, aid not only ceases to be effective, but can in fact do harm. Based on Mary Anderson’s research:

Experience shows that even when it is effective in doing what it is intended to do to save lives or promote development, aid too often also feeds into, reinforces, and prolongs conflicts.\(^\text{118}\)

Other than this there is little that has been said for certain about the interactions between aid and the dynamics of conflict and peace. Jonathan Goodhand noted in an article already in 2002 that one of the reasons for the lack of perspective on this question has to do with the problem of how to understand and define peace\(^\text{119}\). In addition to this he claimed technical problems of attribution, time frames and levels of analysis contribute to blurring our vision on the matter.\(^\text{120}\) Christoph Zürcher in turn writes in a more recent article:

…while no one doubts the benefit of a general peace for development, there is hardly consensus on whether international development aid can successfully reverse-engineer the preconditions for peace…we know that a lack of security hampers development, but we do not really know whether development aid has the potential to increase basic security.\(^\text{121}\)

In the remaining sections of this chapter I will provide a closer view into four intersecting strands of thought within the broader debates concerning aid and conflict. (See figure 3 below)

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\(^{117}\) Paffenholz, *Peace and Conflict Sensitivity in International Cooperation: An Introductory Overview*.

\(^{118}\) Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace - or War* 37.

\(^{119}\) Goodhand writes on the blurring of the distinction between war and peace by noting that there is unlikely to be a smooth transition from war to peace in contemporary conflicts in which adaptive and relatively stable social systems emerge. Using Afghanistan as an example he claims “[i]t is an oversimplification… habitually to associate violence with disorder and peace with the return of order. Violent resistance may ultimately have positive social outcomes…[and c]onversely ‘peace’ may be associated with particular political agendas, and in the interests of dominant groups – ‘national reconciliation’, promoted by the Najibullah regime for instance, or ‘security’ brought by the Taliban could not bring lasting and equitable peace.”

\(^{120}\) Goodhand, *Aiding Violence or Building Peace? The Role of International Aid in Afghanistan* 839-841.

\(^{121}\) Zürcher, *Conflict, State Fragility and Aid Effectiveness: Insights from Afghanistan* 470.
The choice to focus on the topics of working in, on or around conflict; peace and conflict sensitivity; risk management thinking; and intervention ethics has been made based on what I have described in the beginning of this chapter about my research being oriented toward a policy-relevant, problem-solving approach. As such it is also reflective of my former professional roles as peace adviser and conflict sensitivity trainer in the development NGO sector. This is true most obviously for the selection of the topic on peace and conflict sensitive development. In addition to this, however, the decision to concentrate on the four chosen themes was made with the help of a guiding question that lies also at the roots of this research: “what do we know about carrying out development interventions in conflict-affected contexts?” My aim in the remaining parts of this chapter is thus to tap on to discussions around this question. The chosen four themes also form a backdrop against which to discuss the findings of this study. Finally, the topics to be presented below have been picked for closer inspection with due consideration of the empirical content of this doctoral dissertation. The said four themes correlate with what also clearly emerged in the process of producing the narrative analysis of my primary data. This is especially the case concerning risk management thinking and the discussion of intervention ethics – two bodies of research that I have not been as familiar with prior to this research process.

Figure 3. Conceptual framework of the study
2.3 Working in, on or around conflict

One of the fundamental questions for aid actors cooperating with conflict-prone or –affected countries is whether to intervene at all. Once a decision to intervene has been made, choices concerning programmatic focus and intervention goals need to be made. It has become commonly accepted in the aid practitioner and expert community that aid actors have three main options on the operational level in this regard. Jonathan Goodhand defines three broad alternative approaches to conflict for development actors: working around, in or on conflict. It is in place to disclose to the reader here that this division of approaches, although seemingly simple and fairly unsophisticated as a theoretical model at the outset, emerges as a central organizing framework in discussing the results of this study.

The first approach defined by Goodhand is working around conflict: This is a “conflict blind approach” where aid actors avoid the issue of conflict or treat it as a negative externality and constraint to development. In this approach macro reform processes adopt a “one size fits all approach” irrespective of a country’s vulnerability to conflict. Donors work around conflict either because they have limited mandates or because their policies define security narrowly in terms of security of commercial contracts or investments, rather than human security and structural stability. In situations of open conflict and tensions they withdraw activities and put development “on hold.” According to Goodhand, working around conflict in this way is against currently acknowledged good practice. Jos De La Haye and Koenraad Denayer point to one variety of working around conflict as aiming to carry out conventional development work in denial, or in spite of conflict and contextual tensions, and claim that this “conflict blindness” may be present at different phases of an intervention. They refer to a report of the German Development Co-operation Agency that identified some possible reasons for this kind of “conflict ignorance”: Project implementation may at times be very demanding, in particular when it is compounded by the challenges posed by the complex operational situation. The two-fold impact (i.e. positive and negative) is

122 Other than where it is separately noted, the rest of this chapter section is based on Jonathan Goodhand, "Working 'in' and 'on' War," in Civil War, Civil Peace, eds. Helen Yanacopulos and Joseph Hanlon (Athens, Ohio: The Open University in association with James Currey, Oxford and Ohio University Press, 2006) 280-313; Goodhand, Aiding Violence or Building Peace? The Role of International Aid in Afghanistan 30-33. See also; Jonathan Goodhand, Violent Conflict, Poverty and Chronic Poverty Research Centre, 2001) 4-49; Jonathan Goodhand and Philippa Atkinson, Conflict and Aid: Enhancing the Peacebuilding Impact of International Engagement. (London: International Alert, 2001) 27.
thus easily ignored. In other cases, there may be fear that any problems arising from the context may be ascribed to staff incompetence. There may be fear that transmission of negative information would result in the feasibility of a project being called into question, or of it being completely abandoned due to fears related to security risks. Furthermore De La Haye et al. write that there is a tendency within the field of development cooperation to devise mechanisms that shield project activities from a hostile environment instead of taking direct account of the immediate conflict context and situations. As a consequence, project teams may have vested interests in ensuring technical implementation at the expense of appropriately taking into account the local political dynamics of the context\textsuperscript{123}.

The second approach is working \textit{in conflict}\textsuperscript{124}: Here aid actors acknowledge conflict in the intended operational area and have some awareness that development can influence conflict. They recognize the need to be sensitive to conflict and adapt policies and development programs accordingly. Through the approach of working in conflict the aim is to mitigate conflict-related risks and to minimize the potential for development programs to exacerbate violence. In practice, this may mean adapting conditionalities to analyses of conflict-related risks, the use of operating standards, codes of conduct, as well as coordination mechanisms. It may also involve experimentation with sustainable livelihood approaches in unstable contexts. Furthermore, Goodhand suggests that donors and agencies using this approach could develop politically informed poverty reduction programs that address underlying sources of grievance. Such programs

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\textsuperscript{123}De La Haye and Denayer, \textit{PCLA: A Tool to Move from Conflict Ignorance to Conflict Sensitivity within Development, Humanitarian Aid and Peacebuilding Work} 49-50.

\textsuperscript{124}According to Goodhand individuals and agencies working “in” or “on” conflict have an impact on the dynamics of open or latent conflict itself, and therefore cannot be considered as neutral actors. He argues that those who intervene in conflict situations need to think of themselves less as project managers and more as change agents who understand and have influence on the conflict. He calls for interveners to look beyond traditional project-based approaches and envisions a strategic shift from “development as delivery” to “development as leverage.” Development practitioners have traditionally focused on “what they can control,” rather than addressing broader issues concerning what they can understand and influence. Logical framework planning tools and other management systems commonly applied by development actors create an illusion of control, despite the often rapidly changing circumstances in conflict and conflict-affected situations. While these systems are important, they may, paradoxically, undermine an intervening organization’s capacity to operate responsively in unstable situations or in circumstances where the threat of violent conflict is imminent. This is especially so if the planning and implementation systems lead to rigidity and focus on internal processes, instead of taking note pro-actively of the dynamics of the external environment.
may not address conflict in the short term but may be seen to decrease a country’s predisposition to conflict in the long term.

The third approach is that of working on conflict. Here actors are aware that all interventions can contribute to building peace. This approach often involves explicit focus on conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation. The approach entails concentration on “greed” as well as “grievance” in tackling conflict. This may involve creating policies that limit the opportunities for greed, including the development of international regulatory systems, targeted conditionalities or providing profitable alternatives for conflict profiteers or spoilers. Donors and agencies that opt for an explicit focus on conflict tend to support work on mediation, human rights issues and reconciliation. Furthermore they apply peace and conflict sensitive approaches to development and peacebuilding interventions.

2.4 Peace and conflict sensitivity

The second theoretical and conceptual lens with which the resulting narrative of this study is discussed toward the end of this research report is the notion of peace and conflict sensitivity. I will first provide a brief account of the background of the thinking on conflict sensitivity, followed by three subsections discussing three central elements of the notion: contextual knowing, the negative effects of transferring resources into conflict-affected areas, as well as the messages that actors and activities of aid send out.

The conflict-development community, newly formed in the 1990s, explored and further developed a range of methods, tools and assessment procedures in order to seek out development-oriented answers to working in conflict and conflict-affected areas. Conflict sensitive development emerged as a catchall term for addressing these tools and methods as well as policies for working in conflict zones and conflict-affected contexts. In this broad sense the notion may be understood as having as much to do with national and international policy as it does with ground

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125 I use the terms peace and conflict sensitivity and conflict sensitivity interchangeably.

126 Paffenholz, Understanding the Conflict-Development Nexus and the Contribution of Development Cooperation to Peacebuilding 280.
level guidance and tools used by development actors in conflict and conflict-affected contexts.\textsuperscript{127}

In addition to the seminal work by Mary B. Anderson and her team within the framework of the Local Capacities for Peace (LCP) project\textsuperscript{128} discussed above in the section on previous research, the notion of conflict sensitivity owes largely to research and thinking on Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA);\textsuperscript{129} the macro conflict assessment work conducted by the Department for International Development of United Kingdom (DFID), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank and other donors; not to mention the insights provided by some three decades of previous academic discourse on questions of peace, conflict and development.\textsuperscript{130} By the early 2000s it was broadly accepted among aid actors that “doing good” in addition to merely “doing no harm” with regard to conflict contexts was possible by applying proactive conflict sensitive approaches (CSA) to development and relief planning and implementation.\textsuperscript{131} Nevertheless, there continues to be a strong predilection of understanding “do no harm” in a narrow way literally to mean only ensuring that interventions are not themselves a direct cause of insecurity and harm.\textsuperscript{132} For this reason some have opted to call the notion “peace and conflict sensitivity” instead,

\begin{itemize}
\item Reychler uses the notion of Conflict Impact Assessment System (CIAS) in a similar sense as what is elsewhere referred to as peace and conflict sensitivity. He explains the aims of CIAS as being 1) to assess the positive and/or negative impact of different kinds of interventions on the dynamics of conflict; 2) to contribute to the development of a more coherent conflict prevention and peacebuilding policy; 3) to serve as a sensitizing tool for policymakers, helping them to identify weaknesses in their approach; and 4) to further the economy of development and peacebuilding efforts. For a discussion of CIAS including concerns and criticisms, levels of assessment on policy and project levels, as well as actors and appropriate timing and placement of a CIA in project processes, see Reychler, From conflict to sustainable peacebuilding: concepts and analytical tools 8-12.
\item Anderson, \textit{Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace - or War.}
\item Adam Barbolet et al., \textit{The Utility and Dilemmas of Conflict Sensitivity} (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2005) 3.
\item Kenneth Bush, \textit{A Measure of Peace: Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) of Development Projects in Conflict Zones} (Ottawa: International Development Research Center, 1998). Also institutions such as the International Development Research Centre and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) worked on developing analytical methods using conflict analysis matrixes applied in political early warning systems. See Zupan (2005) 51.
\end{itemize}
claiming that this way the dimension of supporting peace is more clearly in the picture.\textsuperscript{133}

\section*{2.4.1 Contextual knowing}

What does (peace and) conflict sensitivity\textsuperscript{134} mean, on the practical level of aid interventions then? A consortium of international humanitarian and peacebuilding organizations has defined conflict sensitivity in relation to contextual knowing as the capacity of an organization to:

understand the (conflict) context in which it operates; understand the interaction between its operations and the (conflict) context; and act on the understanding of this interaction to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts on the (conflict) context and the intervention.\textsuperscript{135}

In other words, conflict sensitivity may be understood as a sensitivity to an intervention’s potential impact on the specific context in which it is being implemented: “by being conflict-sensitive one stands a better chance to ensure that the intervention will not fuel …conflict.” De La Haye et al. claim that conflict sensitive approaches are in fact not completely novel at their core to the management of interventions. “By and large, where the potential impact of the intervention on the prevailing situation has been studied, it has demonstrated common sense.” Studies on the failure of conflict prevention point, however, to two key factors for the repeated occurrence of missed opportunities in conflict management: 1) the lack of adequate understanding of the situation, and 2) the failure to feed whatever information there is on the situation back into the decision-making process.\textsuperscript{136}

The key to conflict sensitivity is in the ability of aid actors to be attentive to the conflict environment in which they are operating during each step of the

\textsuperscript{133} Paffenholz, \textit{Peace and Conflict Sensitivity in International Cooperation: An Introductory Overview}.

\textsuperscript{134} I use the terms conflict sensitivity and peace and conflict sensitivity interchangeably in this study.


\textsuperscript{136} De La Haye and Denayer, \textit{PCIA: A Tool to Move from Conflict Ignorance to Conflict Sensitivity within Development, Humanitarian Aid and Peacebuilding Work} 49-50.
management cycle, i.e. from the design and planning phases to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This is a tall order that requires the capacity to think “laterally” – in other words away from the immediately defined objective and beyond the direct results of the intervention. De La Haye and Denayer write that lateral thinking should be understood here as “thinking the intervention through on its merits vis-à-vis the dynamics of the conflict in which one is involved.” This calls for asking explicit questions with respect to the impact of the intervention on the conflict dynamics and vice versa.\textsuperscript{137}

The array of methods created for peace and conflict sensitivity varies in their complexity and practical applicability, but the analysis of the core dimensions of a conflict setting and the dynamics of the conflict is common to all.\textsuperscript{138} This includes looking to the historical background of the conflict and the prevailing political, social and economic structures and processes within the immediate operational context, as well as identifying the positions of various conflict parties. In addition to this the dynamics and stages, structural causes and core problems of the conflict are examined.\textsuperscript{139} Drawing on Lund, conflict sensitive programming could also be seen as consisting of three basic steps as follows:\textsuperscript{140}

Conflict assessment: Systematic examination of the conditions of the operational context with the objective to identify sources of conflict and processes that may be helping to keep such conflicts under control or to build peace. The aim is to understand what drives conflict in order to be able to identify entry points for preventive action and conflict transformation.

Program review: Assessment of whether planned or existing development activities are effective in ameliorating conflict drivers or enhancing peace capacities. By extension, it should be crosschecked that these activities are not doing harm by exacerbating negative factors or weakening positive factors.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid. 50-51.

\textsuperscript{138} It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to give a full account of the multiple tools and methods developed under the heading of Conflict Sensitive Approaches. Three of the more comprehensive and better-known ones are Mary B. Anderson’s “Do No Harm” –framework and its various applications by numerous organizations; Kenneth Bush’s extended PCIA approach, “Hands on PCIA;” and Thania Paffenholz and Luc Rey切尔’s “Aid for Peace” –approach. See Anderson, \textit{Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace - or War}; Thania Paffenholz and Luc Rey切尔, \textit{Aid for Peace: A Guide to Planning and Evaluation for Conflict Zones} (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2007); Kenneth Bush, \textit{"Aid for Peace" A Handbook for Applying Peace & Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) to Peace III Projects} (Derry/Londonerderry: INCORE, University of Ulster and United Nations University, 2009).

\textsuperscript{139} Zupan 51.

Program modification and strategy development: Adapting development programs/projects, and adding new components or resources if necessary, with the aim of maximizing their contribution to the building of peace. This would include e.g. seeking out other partners working in the same area to encourage as comprehensive and multi-faceted an approach as possible.

The second step defined by Lund concerning program review constitutes a key factor connecting the more comprehensive approaches to peace and conflict sensitivity to one another. Corene Crossin and Jessie Banfield have coined this as the “two-way-street” between the intervention and the context. Just as an intervention may be adversely affected by violent conflict or other instabilities and insecurities prevailing in the context, the intervention itself will have an impact on the conflict context within which it is located. The intervention and context must thus be understood to have a two-way relationship.

Even where conflict appears to be geographically far from a project, it is possible that investments, in contexts where resources are scarce, will soon become part of the conflict dynamic...attracting attention and demands from conflict actors; bringing migrant [foreign] workers into a locality; and becoming a source of heightened competition locally. Decisions that sponsors take regarding project location, design and management have the potential to impact and distort conflict levels and dynamics. Decisions on the distribution of employment opportunities, security arrangements, relationships with political actors; environmental usage and impact; location of installation; and even social investment [capacity building] and community relations activities often provide the trigger which sparks pre-existing structural and proximate conflict factors into violence, to the detriment of the project itself. Understanding pre-existing tensions, and how a project may impact upon them, is thus central to improved conflict risk assessment.

What about the applicability of peace and conflict sensitivity then? Paffenholz claims the broad variety of tools and methods around the notion have watered down the concepts of PCIA and peace/conflict sensitivity and contributed to confusion among actors in international cooperation. She continues by pointing to two important requirements for good approaches. The first is a systematic link

142 Ibid.
143 Ibid. 1-2.
between the analysis of the context and the implementation of interventions. The second is the combination of a theory of social change with operational requirements for policy and program planning and implementation. Part of the confusion is related to tight-seated professional identities and policy sectors. Mary Anderson has remarked that being sensitive to conflict does not mean diluting or merging organizational expertise or mandate with other sectors, or that development and humanitarian actors should become peace builders or vice versa. Rather, the underlying idea in conflict sensitivity approaches is that aid agencies can and should remain true to their original mandates, continuing to provide the services they are the experts at, but doing it in ways that pro-actively support peace rather than conflict. In addition to being careful not to cause harm. On the same note, De La Haye and Denayer point out that conflict sensitivity is relevant for aid interventions even when they do not operate in clear conflict or conflict-prone areas, nor does the intervention have to work on conflict per se. On the other hand, they prompt that if an intervention does focus primarily on conflict, it does not automatically guarantee that the intervention will have merely beneficial consequences to the conflict.

Critics point to the fact that the Do No Harm/peace and conflict sensitivity debate has been successful only because it takes place within the developmentalist complex and does not thus challenge its very functioning. Indeed, Mary Anderson’s research on local peace capacities, based on which the Do No Harm – thinking has largely been founded, falls within the parameters of what Newman et al. call policy-relevant and problem-solving studies. As such, her research adopts a strong normative stance:

144 Paffenholz, Peace and Conflict Sensitivity in International Cooperation: An Introductory Overview 76-77.  
145 Anderson 3, 38.  
146 De La Haye et al. 50.  
147 Paffenholz, Understanding the Conflict-Development Nexus and the Contribution of Development Cooperation to Peacebuilding 278, 280. With critics of the approach Paffenholz refers to Weiss, Collins and Uvin. Other researchers representing a more critical approach who question the aid system include Mark Duffield who has argued that donors are mainly driven by a realist national agenda and use aid resource allocation as a political instrument. Sunil Bastian in turn is said to have come to the conclusion in his research of donor support to conflict-ridden Sri Lanka that the macro-economic donor-driven agenda after the ceasefire agreement in 2001 supported the recurrence of violence. Also Roland Paris, in his comparative study of eleven post-conflict countries came to the conclusion that rapid introduction of a liberal market economy was a primary cause of instability in all of the studied countries. Also Peter Uvin, in his analysis of the aid system in pre-genocide Rwanda concluded that the aid community had been largely ignorant of the rising radicalization of society and politics, in addition to reinforcing the radicalization through its support to political institutions that had been tied to this process.
Many people criticize international assistance, accurately citing examples of ways in which international aid has done harm rather than good. We note such examples, but we do not condemn aid for its failures. It is a moral and logical fallacy to conclude that because aid can do harm, a decision not to give aid would do no harm. In reality, a decision to withhold aid from people in need would have unconscionable negative ramifications.

We believe international aid is a good thing. We think the world is a better place because when some people suffer, other people who are able to take actions to help lessen that suffering do so. The challenge we see for aid workers – and for the large number of generous and caring individuals who support their work with financial and material contributions – is to figure out how to do the good they mean to do without inadvertently undermining local strengths, promoting dependency, and allowing aid resources to be misused in the pursuit of war.148

Further critique of conflict sensitivity approaches concerns their focus on the project level, which leaves out critical macro-political questions. What is challenged in this is the underlying assumption that making the changes indicated by analyses and assessments will have an overall cumulative impact on the sources of a conflict in a given area, “as if through a leavening influence that works on the whole development program repertoire.”149 The difficulty in assessing the impact of a single intervention on the broader process of building peace in a country arises from the challenge of isolating the precise contribution of a particular intervention from other contributions if something changes in the peace process. In evaluation research this is referred to as the attribution gap. Paffenholz points out that the problem is not unique to peacebuilding, but that similar attribution problems occur just as well in development and policy evaluation.150 On the same token Lund remarks that achieving particular programs’ objectives successfully, even if they are each conflict sensitive, may still not be able to prevent (the escalation or renewal of) conflicts. The challenge is thus for individual programs to “scale up” their

148 Anderson 2.
149 Lund 50. Paffenholz identifies herself as one of these latter critics, together with Luc Reychler. See Paffenholz and Reychler, Aid for Peace: A Guide to Planning and Evaluation for Conflict Zones. Elsewhere Paffenholz has, however, opted both “for more modesty in the debate on assessing the impact of peacebuilding interventions on the macro peacebuilding process (for example, [by] not setting too ambitious goals), and more investment in serious social science research on assessing impacts.” See Paffenholz, Peace and Conflict Sensitivity in International Cooperation: An Introductory Overview (Republic of Germany: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2005) 78.
150 Paffenholz, Peace and Conflict Sensitivity in International Cooperation: An Introductory Overview 78
influence in order to be able to constitute an effective, contextualized multi-program/instrument strategy.\(^\text{151}\)

### 2.4.2 Resource transfers

A second key element used in this study to examine the case study project through the lens of peace and conflict sensitivity has to do with the transfer of resources into the operational context.

Experience shows that even when it is effective in doing what it is intended to do so save lives or promote development, aid...often also feeds into, reinforces, and prolongs conflicts. Again and again aid workers tell how their aid is distorted by local politics and is misappropriated by warriors to support the war. Again and again war victims report that aid is enriching warlords or strengthening the “enemy.” Again and again the systems of aid and the manner in which aid workers interact with conflict reinforce the modes and moods of those at war, undermining and weakening the nonwar aspects of society.

Aid reinforces conflict or strengthens local capacities for peace through the direct and indirect impacts of its resource transfers and through its implicit ethical messages.\(^\text{152}\)

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\(^\text{151}\) Lund (2004) 50. The conclusions reached by the Reflecting on Peace Practices (RPP) project carried out by CDA (formerly the Collaborative for Development Action Inc., currently Collaborative Learning Projects) are instructive in this sense. A key finding of RPP was that operating a large number and variety of separate projects and programs may not exert effective leverage on conflict unless they succeed together to influence “more people” and “key people.” The advice was also to inquire whether projects evaluated were “big enough,” last long enough and target specific potential spoiling factors. See Mary B. Anderson, Lara Olson and Kristin Doughty, *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners* (Cambridge: CDA, Collaborative for Development Action, 2003). On a similar note, the Utstein study for instance has pointed out that instead of investing in the evaluation of project and program level impact evaluations, attention should be focused on assessing the aggregated impacts of given combinations of programs on the macro, multi-actor level. Dan Smith, *Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together - Overview Report of the Joint Utstein Study of Peacebuilding* (Oslo: Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004). There is an emerging trend focusing on the need for holistic approaches to building sustainable peace that call for the use of systemic approaches in designing programs. See e.g. Robert Ricigliano, *Making Peace Last: A Toolbox for Sustainable Peacebuilding* (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2012).

\(^\text{152}\) Anderson 37-38.
From the examples of aid’s negative impacts gathered in many conflict and conflict-affected areas of the world, Mary Anderson’s research found clear and consistent patterns to emerge. Acknowledging that all humanitarian and development interventions involve the transfer of some material or intangible resources (such as food, construction materials, health care, training etc.) Anderson and her team found the influx of resources to affect conflict dynamics in five predictable ways. First, aid resources are often stolen. If stolen by warriors, resources are often used to support armed groups and gain access to weapons. Theft was found to be the most widely recognized process by which aid feeds into conflict. Second, aid affects markets. Interventions have an effect on prices, wages, employment opportunities and profits, and can either reinforce economies of conflict or peace economies. Aid often creates industries of its own too where profits can be made and wages paid. Demand for other assets also rises when aid agencies arrive into a conflict context, bringing up the costs for housing, hotel accommodation, office venues, furniture and equipment. People who own or control these facilities or goods can become wealthy in the midst of otherwise poor conditions. Third, aid has distributional effects. When an intervention is targeted to some groups and not to others, and these groups overlap (even partially) with the divisions represented in the conflict, assistance can reinforce and exacerbate conflict. Experience has shown that in conflict settings targeting aid reinforces divisions rather than the connectors in societies. The profit and wage effects of aid interventions may also reinforce intergroup tensions. Fourth, aid can substitute for local resources that would have been used to meet civilian needs without the intervention, and thus, significant local resources are freed up for the pursuit of war. There is a further political impact to this kind of economic substitution: When external aid actors assume responsibility for civilian survival, this allows local leaders and warriors to define their roles solely in terms of warfare. Fifth, aid legitimizes some people and some actions and weakens or sidelines others. It can support people and actions that support peace and collaboration or those that pursue conflict. When aid agencies need the acceptance of armed factions to gain access to people with whom they must work, that situation reinforces factional power and legitimacy. In cases where aid actors have tried to avoid dealing with the factions controlling the areas in which they work, they have experienced direct and often dire consequences. They have become targets for theft and threats, and intended aid recipients have sometimes been attacked.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{153} Anderson 37-51.
2.4.3 Messages of aid

In addition to delivering goods and services, aid interventions deliver messages. This is the third feature of peace and conflict sensitivity that will be used in the analysis of this case study research. Anderson found in her research that the content and particular ways in which interventions are implemented can also reinforce and worsen conflict tendencies or support the capacities for peace that exist within operational contexts. She found that the messages that aid “sends” are related to and interact with the impacts of the delivered resources discussed above.

In comparison to the effects of resource transfers on conflict discussed above, Anderson claims the effects of hidden or implicit ethical messages are much less clear. The explicit and recognized message of aid interventions is, however, ethical and clear: all innocent civilians caught in a conflict situation on any side should have access to assistance as a matter of principle. Further, outside of situations of open warfare, where people suffer from impoverishment through no fault of their own, others must be able to reach out and help them with spiritual and physical support. The LCP project identified seven types of negative implicit ethical messages that interventions in conflict contexts typically deliver. The first is labeled arms and power. This refers to a common situation in aid interventions where armed guards are hired to protect assets from theft or staff from harm. The concealed moral message perceived by those in the operational context is that it is legitimate to determine with the use of arms, who has access to food, medical supplies, and construction materials, and that security and safety are derived from weapons.154

The second type is disrespect, mistrust and competition among aid actors. This refers to an inability of aid agencies or actors to work with each other in a cordial manner. Examples of this include aid workers’ bad-mouthing of other agencies’ or staff members’ work, and criticism of other actors’ program approaches. The reasons for this kind of disrespect, mistrust and competition vary: sometimes it has to do with differences in outlook on the principles of aid provision; sometimes it results from personality clashes among field-based staff. Different politics of donor countries from which aid agencies come or politics in relation to the events occurring in the recipient country may also be the cause for clashing views. The message conveyed to people in the recipient communities by disrespectful and competitive conduct is that it is not necessary to cooperate with people they do not like, and that there is no need to respect people with whom one disagrees. These

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154 Anderson 55-56.
attitudes may have the result of reinforcing sentiments that underlie many of the intergroup conflicts that shape the spaces within which aid is provided.\textsuperscript{155}

The third type of negative implicit ethical message found in Anderson’s research is titled \textit{aid workers and impunity}. A common example of this is when project employees use the goods and support systems provided by aid interventions for their own purposes and pleasure (e.g. when project vehicles are used for private purposes despite petrol shortage). The message is this: if one has control over resources, it is acceptable to use them for personal benefit without being accountable to anyone else who might have a claim on these resources.\textsuperscript{156}

\textit{Different value for different life} is the fourth type of implicit ethical message. This refers to the policies adopted by aid agencies working in insecure or politically unstable areas, that apply differently to expatriate and local staff. Examples of this include salary levels that are often set at widely divergent rates; or project vehicles being signed out to expatriate staff, whereas local people are expected to walk or use local transportation. Evacuation plans also often focus exclusively on expatriate staff, vehicles, and communications equipment, with the assumption that local people can manage for themselves. The message in this kind of conduct is one of inequality, of differential value of lives (expatriate over local) and time (expatriates deserve rides, local staff must take time to walk to work).\textsuperscript{157}

\textit{Powerlessness} is the fifth type of message. Anderson’s research found that intervention employees often assert their lack of power to have an effect on events or circumstances around them: “I can’t do anything to change this. It’s the headquarters’/donor’s/local people’s/evil warlord’s fault. I am not in charge and cannot control everything that affects me, therefore I am not responsible for the impact of my limited actions.” The message received in this is that individuals in difficult circumstances cannot have much power, and thus do not have to take responsibility for the effects of their actions. It is common for local people in conflict areas to express their powerlessness in relation to greater forces. For many, the responsibility to improve the situation, to make peace, improve administrative processes etc. is someone else’s job.\textsuperscript{158}

When aid workers in are nervous about conflict and tensions, they tend to act in ways that increase suspicion and strains within the operational context, and may

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid. 56.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid. 56-58.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid. 58.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid. 58-59.
even serve to increase the possibility of a violent incident. Based on this observation, Anderson calls the sixth type of negative implicit message *belligerence, suspicion and tension*. If aid workers approach every situation with suspicion and belligerence, it often has the effect of reinforcing the moods and modes of warfare. For example, field staffs tell of their apprehension in approaching manned checkpoints or roadblocks. A typical way of reacting is to be assertive and to expect the worst: “You have no right to stop this vehicle. Don’t you see the name of our organization on the door? You must let me pass!” The messages received are that power is the broker of human relations, and that it is normal to approach everyone belligerently and with suspicion. This in turn limits the range of other possible human interaction by assuming the worst in others. It can reinforce the likelihood that the worst will happen.\(^{159}\)

The final category of negative implicit ethical messages relates to *publicity*. The way in which intervention agency headquarters use images of the circumstances of conflict areas may for instance emphasize the gruesome realities of armed violent conflict and contribute to the victimization of conflict parties. This type of material can reinforce the demonization of one side in a conflict over another. Anderson points out that this is seldom the case and would in fact undermine the humanitarian principle. When this does happen, however, it can reinforce the modes and moods of conflict instead of helping the public or the intervention staff to find equitable ways of responding to those on all sides seeking and hoping for peace and development.\(^{160}\)

The implicit messages described above involve attitudes, approaches, lifestyles and safety of aid workers. Anderson remarks that the aid worker who is unarmed at all times; works collaboratively with all aid workers at all times regardless of differences in principles; who lives modestly; never relaxes in order to identify fully with aid recipients; who is last in line for access to vehicles, equipment and evacuations; who asserts efficacy in everyday work despite the odds against having any influence; who always believes the best about everyone in spite of evidence to the contrary; and who works for the ideal agency that never makes the mistake to use sad-eyed children in its advertising – is the profile of an imaginary creature. How then can aid agency staff members work without reinforcing the moods and modes of conflict in the real world of conflict and conflict-affected contexts? When aid workers are cheated, threatened, or treated with disrespect, “an

\(^{159}\) Ibid. 59.

\(^{160}\) Ibid. 59.
adversarial element creeps into the aid giver – recipient relationship,” claims Anderson. When they are exhausted and fail to see immediate effects of their work, aid workers may lose sight of the ways they might affect positive change. When the operational context is conflicted, the attitude of mistrust, tension and belligerence can be contagious. According to Anderson, experience shows that intervention staff that is mindful of the potential impact of their attitudes on local people, are able to take action that can make a major difference by being persistent, acting as an example to others and by maintaining a consciously positive and open, trustful attitude. From this point of view, the list of negative implicit ethical messages of aid discussed above, could also be used as a checklist for aid actors for the kinds of things to be kept in mind when acting in conflict contexts.

Further based on her research Anderson claims aid workers and recipients of assistance should be closely bound by their common experience:

Aid workers live in difficult circumstances. Separation from family, potential danger, and surrounding tension are difficult to live with day after day. Aid recipients live in difficult circumstances. Separation from family, potential danger, and surrounding tension are difficult to live with day after day.

In most aid intervention settings in conflict areas a bond of common experience is not, however, being born. Anderson points to an essential difference between the groups that cannot be ignored: Aid staff is present by their own choice and are free to leave, also by their own choice. Aid recipients are present because they have no option. Most would probably leave, if they could. Lifestyle choices create more differences. The choices by aid agency staff regarding way of life can alienate, separate and antagonize recipients and set in motion attitudes and processes through which the two groups become locked into mutual mistrust. Aid processes often lead to situations where recipients strive to “get everything we can” and aid workers resort to an attitude of mistrust and control “because we can’t trust these people.”

Choices related to lifestyles are closely linked to those concerning safety. Anderson’s research seems to suggest that reliable security is derived primarily through the protection of recipient communities. Experience shows that when communities value the lives and commitment of aid workers, they try to ensure

161 Anderson 59-60.
162 Ibid. 62.
163 Ibid.
safe environments for those workers. Many humanitarian aid workers had shared their stories in the LCP study of being warned by a local friend that it would be a good time to stay home or take a brief holiday, only to find later that the warning had protected them from an outburst of violence. Anderson’s research also indicates that transparency and openness can enhance the safety of intervention staff. Finally, Anderson points out that in conflict areas “total safety is simply impossible for either local people or for external aid agency staff.” Carrying out aid interventions in complex settings entails danger. This calls for striking a careful balance for international aid agencies and their staffs between the willingness to take conscious risks for aid delivery and appropriate caution to avoid unnecessary risk that would endanger themselves and others. The key to maintaining this balance, claims Anderson, “grows from a deep belief in the value of life and of all lives equally.”

2.5 The rise of risk management thinking

As mentioned above in the introduction to the four themes chosen for closer inspection in this chapter, the decision to discuss risk management thinking as a separate strand of the broader debate on aid and conflict stems in large part from the fact that the theme succinctly emerges from the empirical data of my research. I will therefore next provide a brief view into this thematic, before concluding with a discussion about intervention ethics.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed what Stilhoff and others have coined as the discursive shift toward a newer notion of sustainable development-resilience nexus and away from the security-development nexus. Crucially behind this transition seems to be the idea of actual or potential violent conflict and political instability as a persistent feature of the landscape of the aid industry.

Operating in insecure environments is not only a challenge for low-income households and communities. It is increasingly a challenge for donor agencies; for...indigenous enterprises and foreign investors; and for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including...humanitarian agencies and local community-based groups.  

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164 Ibid. 63-66.
165 Nelson, Operating in Insecure Environments 128-129.
This raises concerns about the risk to aid interventions’ activities, creditworthiness and sustainability. Road blockades and demonstrations by local communities; sabotage of project facilities or installations; assault to or kidnapping of staff; outbreak of violent clashes between local armed adversaries; blackmail and illegal demands for payments, taxes and other contributions by pressure groups – all these are common expressions of violent behavior that impose threats and at times direct costs to investments made by aid interventions, including reputational and legal challenges.166

Mark Duffield remarks, “it should be emphasised, no one is arguing that risks do not exist. It is obvious that they do.” 167 Between 1997 and 2008 there has been both a relative and absolute increase in the number of serious attacks on national and international staff worldwide.168 The growth in the number of incidents and the heightened risk has been explained by the changed nature of conflicts in which irrational non-state actors have emerged as players in conflicts with no respect for the supposed neutrality of humanitarian and other aid personnel. This has been the focus of explanations particularly in the context of the UN system, claims Duffield. He points out, however, that there are other, more critical voices that seek explanations, instead, in the rising international interventionism as well as in internal changes within the UN system itself.169 More than the variety of explanations, what Duffield sees as fundamental in the discussion is what he calls the institutionalization and normalization of risk management that erodes individual and local autonomy in favor of rule through distant security experts and protocols. Furthermore, Duffield is concerned with the observation that risk management within the civilian aid complex has been militarized.170 “[W]ith this comes inescapable organisational demands for greater social conformity including social segregation and defensive living as part of everyday life.” In other words, the recommendation of risk aversion and isolation is becoming a default setting for

166 Crossin and Banfield, Conflict and Project Finance: Exploring Options for Better Management of Conflict Risk 1.


168 Serious attacks refer to injuries, kidnapping and fatalities. Referring to Stoddard et al. (2009) Duffield notes that such incidents have increased from around 30 to 160 annually. Ibid. 22.

169 With internal changes of the UN system Duffield refers in particular to UN integrated missions that bring together under unified management UN’s humanitarian and development work with that of political affairs and peacekeeping.

170 With militarization Duffield refers to what might also be called professionalizing risk management through strict protocols guiding the actions of aid workers.
contemporary aid work. Even if the operational context does not necessarily warrant isolationist and averse behavior, Duffield sees that the militarization of risk management, with its requirements to satisfy organizational protocol, leads to security becoming a mandatory performative act.\textsuperscript{171}

Besides outlining the organisational protocols and local security procedures at the duty station, [field security] training covers all aspects of movement; home and office security; health and welfare; and personal safety, including how to respond if under fire or taken hostage…Inside the home, advice is given on locks, window bars and alarms. With regard to the office… the importance of office design is flagged… Besides advice on handling suspicious telephone calls and packages, tips are also given on how to defuse tension and handle hostile crowds.\textsuperscript{172}

Duffield continues to explain how for the new aid subjectivity, with its tilt toward isolation and averting risks, the corresponding architectural form is what he calls the fortified aid compound.\textsuperscript{173} As an architectural form he sees the fortified aid compound merging with global trends toward social segregation, defensive living and elite gated communities. Referring to his research in South Sudan, Duffield notes “it is important to stress that these militarised structures are among the first physical manifestations of the return to peace, albeit an uneasy peace…” and continues: “In considering these structures, it is legitimate to ask what sort of impression they make on the public and, not least, those aid beneficiaries that agencies claim to empower and better?” Duffield concludes by noting that combined with the secure and exclusive means of transportation usually at the disposal of aid workers,

…fortified aid compounds interconnect to form a spatial archipelago of international aid. From this perspective, the network of aid compounds that spans the global borderland provides an important material dimension to liberalism’s external sovereign frontier: the fortified aid compound marks the place where the international space of aid flows physically confronts underdevelopment as dangerous.\textsuperscript{174}

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid. 30.
\textsuperscript{174} Duffield (2012) 31-33. This reference accounts also for the end of the paragraph above.
Whereas Duffield has an analytical and critical approach to looking at risk management in the contemporary aid complex, but offers little in terms of suggestions or practical solutions, Jane Nelson’s account has a more prescriptive tone. Coupling it with the aim to “do no harm,” Nelson names ensuring “the security of its own employees, assets, and in some cases local partners” as one of the priorities in her list of key management challenges and opportunities.\(^{175}\)

At the level of the individual organization, this requires... rigorous and comprehensive risk and impact assessments, as well as emergency planning procedures and the establishment of preparedness guidelines and tools for employees and key... stakeholders.\(^{176}\)

Nelson stresses the importance of training of staff and partners as part of this process. Moreover, she claims the implementation of security mechanisms that protect an organization’s own employees and assets but does not undermine the security, assets or human rights of non-employees is a key challenge. Her suggestion in this regard is to make use for instance of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. Referring to increasing challenges of aid workers being targeted by belligerents, much in line with Anderson who calls for transparency and openness to ensure safety, Nelson emphasizes the need for better communication and the sharing of information between organizations working in the same areas.\(^{177}\)

\(^{175}\) Nelson’s whole list of interrelated management challenges and opportunities is as follows: Do no harm; protect intervention’s own employees and assets; extend emergency planning and response strategies to host communities; invest in local socioeconomic development and community resilience; build local capacity of civil society organizations, community-based initiatives, and the media; focus on high-risk and high-potential population groups – youth, women, indigenous peoples, ethnic and religious minorities; support direct efforts to tackle weak governance and inadequate public institutions; engage in policy dialogue to create the enabling conditions for peace and prosperity. See Jane Nelson, "Operating in Insecure Environments," in Too Poor for Peace? Global Poverty, Conflict, and Security in the 21st Century, eds. Lael Brainard and Derek Chollet (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2007) 130.

\(^{176}\) Nelson, Operating in Insecure Environments 139.

\(^{177}\) Ibid.
2.6 Intervention ethics

I will conclude this chapter on the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of this research with a presentation of *eight principles for intervention*. It complements the set of theories, concepts and ideas discussed above with which I will discuss the findings of my research in chapter eight. This section draws on Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall’s framework of intervention principles.\(^\text{178}\)

As has been brought up in the previous sections of this chapter, one of the things that is commonly known about intervention in conflict contexts is that third parties, whatever their mandate or conviction, have an effect on conflict dynamics, and their good intentions seldom guarantee good outcomes. Continuing in the tradition of the conflict resolution field, in which questions concerning ethics of intervention have been considered important from the start,\(^\text{179}\) Ramsbotham et al. have elucidated a set of principles for international interventions.\(^\text{180}\) They have put together the *set of intervention principles based on the conviction that firm and carefully applied ethical criteria are an essential consideration for those who intervene in conflict, at any level or stage*. The framework is the result of a survey and merging together of two overlapping literatures: that concerning basic intervention relations and criteria recommended for principled and effective international peacekeeping, on the one hand, and the expanding array of principles and guidelines for ethical interventions produced by humanitarian, development and conflict resolution NGOs and IGOs, on the other. The principles for international intervention suggested by Ramsbotham et al. are those concerning impartiality, mutuality, sustainability, complementarity, reflexivity, consistency, accountability, and universality.\(^\text{181}\)

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\(^{178}\) Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts*. The main set of eight principles presented here correlate directly with the framework of Ramsbotham et al. The wording in my presentation of the framework here is, however, altered to some extent in order to link the principles more clearly to development interventions in a conflict-affected context.

\(^{179}\) Ramsbotham et al. refer here to the classic text, “The Ethics of Social Intervention” from 1978 by Bermant, Kelman and Warwick.

\(^{180}\) The framework is oriented toward “conflict resolution and comparable kinds of international intervention,” including intervention by humanitarian aid and development workers as well as peacekeepers.

The principle of impartiality implies that regardless of the specific role of the intervener in a conflict or conflict-affected context, contributions toward building peace fall short unless the interests of all those affected are properly taken into account. At the core of this principle lie the ideas of win-win outcomes and the importance of responding to human needs, a factor determined crucial for conflict resolution processes. The parallel to this may be found in the idea of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) concerning impartiality as non-discrimination in responding to need. Impartiality is distinguished here from the principle of neutrality, which refers to political non-alignment/non-political engagement. In essence neutrality means the commitment to not take sides or engage in controversies of a political, racial, ideological or religious nature. The original idea of neutrality, in the sense of operating only with the consent of all parties, gave way to that of impartiality in the 1990s.\(^{182}\) The conflict resolution field emphasizes the fact that in areas of conflict everything is politicized, bringing to the fore that the impartiality of interveners will be contested, no matter what. This, claim Ramsbotham et al., suggests only that impartiality is a value that must be struggled for.\(^{183}\)

The principle of mutuality has to do with the relation between the interveners and those they purport to be assisting. It determines that interveners ensure that the intervention will more likely be seen to do more good than harm. A sign of little or no mutuality would be when outsiders impose their own concepts and values without regard for the needs and desires of the recipients of aid. Further, the principle of mutuality demands that indigenous initiatives and capabilities be prioritized and empowered, and that interventions are carried out without damage to local economies and with due respect for local cultures.\(^{184}\)

The principle of sustainability is central to development, humanitarian and conflict resolution interventions. It requires careful consideration of the viability and appropriateness of entry strategies with regard to the conditions in the receiving area. According to the principle of sustainability, exit strategies in turn should be determined according to the needs of those on whose behalf the

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\(^{182}\) This happened in the evolution of peacekeeping doctrine where impartiality was seen as a key criterion distinguishing principled peacekeeping from interstate war.

\(^{183}\) Ramsbotham et al. 320-321.

\(^{184}\) Ramsbotham et al. 322.
The principle of *complementarity* refers to relations between different interveners in a given context. The overarching requirement of this principle is that the efforts of interveners should complement each other for the greater good of those for whom the intervention is undertaken. This does not mean limiting diversity, which can be seen as a positive thing. Rather, the aim of the principle is to overcome the risk of “competitive altruism” by prohibiting duplications and unnecessary overlap, avoidable failures of communication and rivalries among aid actors that could be damaging.\(^\text{186}\)

The principle of *reflexivity* requests that interveners look critically at themselves, and ask: What are the aims, interests and motives for our intervention? What constituencies do we represent with this intervention? On what authority are we acting? What kinds of advocacy do we pursue and why? The purpose of this is to ensure that interveners’ purposes are not incompatible with the declared aims of the intervention.\(^\text{187}\)

The principle of *consistency* relates to relations between interventions taking place in different conflict arenas. The requirement is that the response of an intervention in one location should be equivalent to intervention by the same actor in another locality. The aim is to avoid accusations of hypocrisy and double standards.\(^\text{188}\)

Relations between interveners and those in whose name they claim to act are governed by the principle of *accountability*. Sometimes the sponsors of interventions are themselves part of the intervention they are sponsoring. In such cases they too should be prepared to answer for their own motives and actions. There may be wider claims behind this to be acting in the name of the conflict parties (linking this to the principle of mutuality discussed above) or of the international community as a whole (which links this to the principle of universality discussed below). The principle of accountability places emphasis on the importance of ongoing comparative assessments of the effectiveness of present and past operations. This is connected to the burgeoning field of impact assessments that

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\(^{185}\) Ibid.  
\(^{186}\) Ibid. 323.  
\(^{187}\) Ibid.  
\(^{188}\) Ibid.
are seen to be essential for identifying lessons learned and for improving performance.\textsuperscript{189}

Finally, the principle of \textit{universality} sums up the other principles into what Ramsbotham et al. call an “overall transformative cosmopolitan framework.” In cases of cross-border intervention conducted in the name of the international collectivity, the principle of universality rules that such enterprises must be endorsed cross-culturally. This too is originally an ICRC principle where the underlying idea of the movement’s universality stems from attachment of each of its members to common values. This, claim Ramsbotham and others, is clearly in no way unproblematic, as it calls for the question whether there is such a thing as universal values – and how may what some see as passing of western hegemony affect this.\textsuperscript{190}

\section*{2.7 Research task and questions}

The overall research task that I have set for this doctoral dissertation is to explore through an in-depth single case study what is entailed in carrying out a development cooperation project in a conflict-affected context. The main research question guiding the narrative analysis of this study is the following:

\begin{quote}
How is it that the conflict-affected context was considered within the framework of the case study project, and what (f)actors contributed to or inhibited this?
\end{quote}

This general research question takes an interest in the influences of the conflict-affected context on the design and implementation of the case study project. It looks to the ways that the project pro-actively and/or reactively responded to or made note of the various contextual challenges\textsuperscript{191} along the way, from the early design stages to the completion of the project.

The theoretical and conceptual framework discussed in this chapter gives rise to additional, more specific questions. It is through answering these questions that a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{189} Ramsbotham et al. 323-324.
\item \textsuperscript{190} Ibid. 324.
\item \textsuperscript{191} I use the term \textit{contextual challenges} generically in reference to (f)actors in the broader project context (as defined in chapter four) that may have prevented or caused problems for project design and implementation.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
more in-depth perspective may be arrived at of the project as a case of development intervention in a conflict-affected context:

Does the studied project represent a case of working in, on or around conflict?

Are there signs of peace and conflict sensitivity in the project?

In what ways is risk management thinking present in the project?

What does the project look like in reflection of the principles of intervention, defined by Ramsbotham et al. as impartiality, mutuality, sustainability, complementarity, reflexivity, consistency, accountability, and universality?

Figure 4. Research task and questions

As the questions at the nexus of peace, conflict, security and development continue to remain high in societal and practical importance, it makes sense to continue to study them in context. Not only does this type of research help to disclose what is entailed in development practice in a conflict-affected context but it also points to (f)actors that either inhibit or enhance aid interventions’ possibilities to contribute to building peace. Moreover, setting this type of study into the context of specifically Finnish development, it provides Finnish development actors at large a better reflection base than do studies set in contexts other than those included in their area of influence and interest.
3  Research Design, Methodology, Process and More

Narrativity and case study research are the two main tenets that most profoundly inform the research design and methodology of this study. In this chapter I will first discuss the way in which the notion of case study defines my research. This includes an explanation of the choice of case (bilateral development project studied), the funnel model to inquiry created to ensure a multiplicity of perspectives, as well as the choice of the “case within case” (one district and one local setting studied as an example of the broader intervention). The sections on case study are followed by a longer discussion of narrativity. Narrativity not only provides for an epistemological foundation to my research, but combined with the notion of appreciative inquiry, narrativity is also at the core of the chosen method of collecting interview data. My method of data analysis is also based on narrativity; and finally, the study results in a narrative in its own right about how it was that the conflict-affected context in Nepal was taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the Finnish – Nepali bilateral Rural Village Water Resources Management Project. These various aspects of narrativity will each be discussed in this chapter, as will the notion of appreciative inquiry and my use of it in this study. Woven into the discussion of each of these themes are examples and reflections from the research process. Lastly, positionality, scope and limits of the study as well as normativity and ethical concerns are also discussed in this chapter.

3.1  Case study

The word “case” is derived from the Latin casus, which means an occurrence, something that happens. The case study method has been referred to as “arguably...the first method of social science” with a long history beginning with Frederic Le Play (1806-1882) in France and the so-called Chicago School in the

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United States, including luminaries such as Ernest W. Burgess, George Herbert Mead, Everett C. Hughes, and Herbert Blumer. Case study was the dominant method of most of social science disciplines in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\(^{193}\) It has also been used in early development studies looking to distill experience of development interventions for institutional learning.\(^{194}\) Case study continues to remain popular as a research tradition still today, and is behind “[a] significant part of what we know about the social and political world…” In IR, case studies have made central contributions in particular in the subfields of international political economy and international security. Case study is also commonly used in in the field of peace and conflict research.\(^{195}\)

According to Pascal Vennesson, in using case study, the challenge is to acknowledge and uncover the specific meaning of the chosen case, while extracting knowledge actually or potentially related also to other cases. In other words, a case may be understood as a phenomenon, or an event, chosen, conceptualized and analyzed empirically as a manifestation of a broader class of phenomena or events. In his discussion of the definition and characteristics of case studies, Vennesson places emphasis on four points. First, the case is not merely a unit of analysis or observation taken as data. Nor is it a data category, but rather a theoretical category. Second, the delimitation of a case is the product of the theoretical conceptualization used by the researcher. In other words, the case is not \textit{a priori} delimited spatially or otherwise. The boundaries of a case are never obvious or to be assumed: they result from theoretical choices. Third, the phenomenon under study may be either contemporary or from the past; and fourth, data may be collected in various ways in case study research and it can be both qualitative and quantitative.\(^{196}\)

John Gerring presents a conundrum of case study as “house building:”


There are two ways to learn to build a house. One might study the construction of many houses… Or one might study the construction of a particular house. The first approach is a cross-case method. The second is a within-case or [single] case study method. While both are concerned with the same general subject – the building of houses – they follow different paths to this goal… The same could be said about social research. Researchers may choose to observe lots of cases superficially, or [one or] a few cases more intensively.\textsuperscript{197}

For Gerring the case study rests implicitly on the existence of a micro-macro link in social behavior. He claims that it is a form of cross-level inference:

Sometimes, in-depth knowledge of an individual example is more helpful than fleeting knowledge about a large number of examples. We gain better understanding of the whole by focusing on a key part.\textsuperscript{198}

This research project has been carried out as an in-depth single case study\textsuperscript{199}, as defined by Gerring above, or in Druckman’s terms, as an analytical enhanced single case study. As such it is not only descriptive – an unavoidable characteristic of any type of case study – but also exploratory, interpretive and analytical.\textsuperscript{200} Following Vennesson this case study is descriptive in that it constitutes a systematic description of the studied phenomenon with no explicit theoretical intention at the outset. It explores a subject about which fairly little is previously known, looking to the phenomenon of Finnish development aid in conflict and aims to shed new light on known data. It is here, claims Vennesson, that the descriptive aspect of case study is invaluable.\textsuperscript{201} The fieldwork and data collection for this study was undertaken before the final definition of all of the more specific research questions, as is typical for exploratory case studies.\textsuperscript{202} The interpretive and analytical nature of this research in turn stems from my viewing the chosen case through a specific

\textsuperscript{197} Gerring 1.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{199} The unit of analysis of this study is the first phase (2006-2010) of a Finnish – Nepali bilateral development cooperation project (Rural Village Water Resources Management Project), conducted in Mid- and Far Western Nepal in the aftermath of an open violent conflict.
\textsuperscript{201} Vennesson 227-228.
\textsuperscript{202} Yin 230.
interpretive theoretical and conceptual framework. By doing so, I aim to provide a broader understanding of what happened with the studied project. In this sense the case serves also as an example of the application of the concepts.203

This study may also be understood as a combination of an intrinsic and instrumental case study, in the sense described by Bruce L. Berg. Referring to Stake (1994, 1995), Berg speaks of intrinsic case studies that are undertaken when the researcher wants to better understand a particular case. Instead of the case studied representing other cases or illustrating some particular trait, characteristic or problem, it is because of the uniqueness or ordinariness of the studied unit of analysis that a case becomes interesting. The role of the researcher in intrinsic case studies is thus to better understand the distinctive aspects of the particular unit of analysis being studied. Further, this research is instrumental in the sense that its objective is to provide deeper insights into the studied issue.204

Following Levy, this research may finally also be described as a theory-guided idiographic case study, the aim of which is to describe, explain, interpret and understand a single case “as an end in itself rather than as a vehicle for developing broader theoretical generalizations.” Unlike inductive case studies, this theory-guided study is explicitly structured by a solid conceptual framework, which focuses attention on certain theoretically specified aspects of reality.205 Instead of striving to draw conclusions from this study that could be formally generalized, the aim of this case study is primarily to gain knowledge of a phenomenon in the thematic sphere of aid and conflict and as represented in a case of implementing Finnish development policy. Further, this study strives to facilitate learning in particular among Finnish development and peacebuilding actors, in addition to providing a background against which possible further research interests may play out.206 In other words, I do not claim that this entire study with all of its details is relevant for any other conflict-affected context where development interventions are carried out, nor for any other intervention carried out in a conflict-affected

203 Druckman 167.
204 Berg 229.
206 For a discussion on the generalizability of case studies, see Bent Flyvbjerg. "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research," Qualitative Inquiry 12, no. 2 (2006) 224-228. Flyvbjerg claims: One can often generalize on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as supplement or alternative to other methods. But formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas “the force of example” and transferability are underestimated.
context. The historical and political background of Nepal and the local project contexts, as well as their interactions with the studied development intervention are unique. So is the group of actors involved in the studied case. However, the interactions between a project and its context touch upon causality, as do the interactions among the various (f)actors of the studied intervention. In Ruzzene’s terms this implies *comparability*. Following from this, it may be concluded that the perspectives brought forth through this study might be relevant also for other settings where development interventions are planned and implemented in conflict-affected contexts as well as for other interventions in other contexts.

Overall, Robert K. Yin’s work on case study research has been a significant influence to my construction of the design of this study, in addition to acting as useful guidance in carrying out the research process. Suffice it here for me to point out how, in order to help deal with the problems of establishing construct validity and reliability of the case study evidence in this study, I have attempted to follow Yin’s principles of data collection for case studies. First, I have used multiple sources of evidence, as will be shown in the section presenting the research data. Secondly, during the research process I have maintained a case study database of all data collected and used for this study. As the interview data is bound by requirements of anonymity, it is not retrievable by outsiders, but instead

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208 Related to the question of generalizability of research is its affiliation to either nomothetic or idiographic tradition. If I were to place this study on an axis of idiographic vs. nomothetic research, I would clearly place it closest to the former. I understand the notion of nomothetic research as having its ideals within positivist thinking and natural sciences. Nomothetic research is about attempting to establish general laws and generalizations with the aim of obtaining objective knowledge through scientific methods. Moreover, the methods associated with a nomothetic approach include the collection of mainly quantitative data, which are then statistically analyzed in order to create predictions and generalizations. The above is not an accurate description of my study, the primary aim of which is to understand the phenomenon being studied (aid in conflict), to describe the unique and individual aspects of reality as they are found in the chosen case, and to increase (self-)understanding among actors within the peace-security-development nexus. This in turn is linked to a philosophical division – on which unanimity is yet to be found – within IR research between explanation and understanding. In this latter debate I locate this study as positioned somewhere in between or as a combination of the two, yet closer to understanding, which refers to examining the phenomenon being studied from within. The objective is to arrive at an understanding of the (f)actors guiding the unfolding of events and decision-making. See e.g. Christer Pursiainen and Tuomas Forsberg, *Ulkopolitiikkaa norsunlaitosin* (Tampere: Chan Puma House Oy, 2015) 29-31. I touch upon the theme of case study, narrative reasoning and generalization again in the section on Narrative analysis below.

209 Yin 97-106.
anonymized and other public elements of the database will be presented later as matrixes in the appendix. Finally, I have strived to create a chain of evidence in the process by making sufficient citations of relevant portions of the database by citing specific documents, interviews, and observations. Included in my research database is also information of the circumstances under which the evidence was collected. I will present the data of this study and discuss the process of data collection in more detail in later sections of this research report below.

3.1.1 Choice of case

In defining the unit of analysis for this study, I have been guided mainly by the writings of Yin and Della Porta. This component of the research design is related to the fundamental task of defining what this study is a case of. Once I had generally identified the case through my initial interest of knowledge as being concerned with the practice of Finnish development aid in conflict-affected contexts, I proceeded to make further decisions on its boundaries and focus. Of the criterion discussed by Donatella Della Porta for case selection, I have heeded with the following in particular: units of analysis in case studies must be appropriate to the kind of theoretical problem posed by the researcher, and be relevant to the phenomenon being studied; there should be sufficient data available referring to this unit; and finally, the decisions to select and classify units of analysis should be based on repeatable procedure.210 Yin in turn maintains: “…for almost any topic that might be chosen, specific time boundaries are needed to define the beginning and end of the case…” claiming that it is delineations like this that determine the limits of the data collection and analysis.211 In the following, I will present in more detail the process of choosing the case project to be studied for this doctoral dissertation.

At the outset of this research process, I contacted officials at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA)212 in order to establish research cooperation for my doctoral research project. Through initial discussions I found my way to the MFA.
archives in the spring of 2007 to examine the documentation of some possible development cooperation projects carried out in conflict-affected areas (mainly in Nepal and Ethiopia). After preliminary inspection of archival materials I found Finnish bilateral development cooperation with Nepal – in particular the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project (RVWRMP) – to constitute a suitable case for this research project. First of all, the intervention was ongoing (2006-2010), making it an interesting case in the sense of the possibilities for live interaction and participation by project stakeholders in my study. Secondly, the project would constitute a clearly bounded system, generally a point considered as necessary for case studies and also called for from the perspective of narrative research. A third aspect making this project an attractive case for my research was the fact that it was being carried by a consultant company (Finnish Consulting Group, FCG, formerly Planning Center/Suunnittelukeskus) that had a decade’s worth of experience working during the conflict in Nepal prior to starting this project. This was particularly intriguing from the perspective that I wanted to conduct my research with an appreciative inquiry approach. I had found out by this point through my discussions with the ministry officials that things had gone fairly well in previous projects carried out by FCG during the conflict in Nepal. For this reason I felt hopeful that my research with an appreciative inquiry approach would result in findings about what had worked well in conducting a development cooperation project in a conflict-affected context. Finally, I felt that choosing a bilateral development cooperation project would constitute a large and heavy enough case. First of all I felt that this project would be able to provide for a sufficient body of data for a good case study. The point of the chosen case study project being “large and heavy enough” is related also to my position as a member of the Finnish community of development cooperation and peacebuilding actors, and my aim to contribute to the discussion within that community on the inter-linkages between peace and development. Taking my prior professional background of working mainly with development and peace NGOs, it would have been a natural choice to pick an NGO project. But my ambition was to look at something with more financial weight. Why? Because – rightly or wrongly – I had the inclination that what ever I might find in a case that costs more for the Finnish taxpayer, might also have more influence in the peace-development debate.  

213 Country and region-specific development cooperation (into which bilateral development cooperation falls) accounted for 33,6% of actual development cooperation disbursements according to intended use in 2006. Multilateral development cooperation accounted for 28,7%, humanitarian
3.1.2 A funnel model to inquiry

Once I had decided which bilateral development cooperation project to study, I needed to make further decisions related to the scope of the inquiry. With a methodological setup based on narrativity and a dataset composed of a vast project documentation and interview data to be compiled from the whole range of project stakeholders, it was clear that it would not be feasible to take the entire project with all of its 10 districts and 80 Village Development Committees (VDCs) into closer inspection. In order to limit the scope of inquiry so as to end up with a manageable dataset to be analyzed through a process of narrative analysis, I came up with the idea of the research as a funnel (see figure 5 below) where perspectives would be gathered from the more general and abstract (or what conventionally is considered to be “the international”) toward the more specific and local.

![Funnel model of research & levels of data](image)

Figure 5. Funnel model of research & levels of data

At the top of the funnel model of this study I have perspectives from national ministries representing the Finnish and Nepali governments in the project. In the middle are viewpoints from the Helsinki-based implementing consultancy (Finnish Consulting Group, FCG), and project support unit in Dhangadhi. Finally, at the narrow end of the funnel there are the perceptions from the district level and one VDC as an example of the ten project districts. These levels of perspective are simultaneously representative of the various stakeholder groups of the studied intervention. The project documentation likewise represents archival material and documents from all of these levels of the project. With various perspectives woven into the study in this way, this dissertation is reminiscent of a collage that views one thing from varying angles. My hope is that by viewing a case of development aid in a conflict-affected context from multiple angles and levels of intervention in this way will be able contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the “one thing” in question and its meanings for the international.

3.1.3 Choice of the case-within-case – Achham district, Bhatakatiya VDC

Through negotiations with the project support unit staff prior to and during my visit to the project in the Spring of 2008 we decided together that Bhatakatiya village development committee (VDC) in Achham district would be a suitable case-within-case to focus on for the local perspective. There were several factors that lead to choosing Bhatakatiya in Achham over the other project areas. I will next shed light on the selection process.

One of my early concerns (trickling down from what I had studied about case study research) had to do with “the representativeness” of the chosen area in relation to the other project areas. As the project’s implementation areas were so widely dispersed, it was difficult or even impossible to pinpoint to a district that would have been in some way representative of the entire project in terms of culture and local dynamics:

PSU employee: … It’s difficult to say which districts would be representative of the entire area, as the cultures and attitudes and languages in the various river basins differ quite a bit from one another…[t]he road network is bad and the passages slow and uncertain (the paths are often cut off for long

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periods during the raining season etc.), [so] the various [project] areas are in fact quite different from one another. Villagers haven’t necessarily had very close connections even to neighboring villages if there’s a mountain in between 😃

…One perspective to choosing the case study district could be [that] the challenges that the project is facing… would be similar to the challenges to implementation that the project has faced elsewhere – for example related to political pressures, issues with the local administration [etc.].

On the other hand, all of the project’s implementation areas had certain characteristics in common from the outset, due to the selection criteria drawn up for project areas. Thus I was bound to have a certain amount of representativeness with whichever district and VDC I would choose.

Remoteness was another one of the selection criteria for the project’s operational areas. This affected my choice of focusing on Achham for this study too. Travelling in the mostly road free mountainous areas of the Far West of Nepal is slow, and being able to get an understanding of local conditions requires time for staying in the villages. At the time of my visit to the project the walk from the road end to the VDCs was in most cases estimated as taking in minimum one whole day. Also some of the VDCs are vast and getting from one village to another even within one VDC can take up to a full day of trekking. The limited time I had for my visit to Nepal and the project (a total of 6 weeks, including interviews in Kathmandu and Dhangadhi) ruled out picking from the most remote project areas such as Humla. In order to be able to connect with the locals and to be able to collect enough data, I wanted to stay in the chosen VDC for at least a full week, or better yet 10 days. The project staff thus suggested choosing one of the districts to which there was a road connection, but that would still be among the more remote areas. Baitadi, Achham, Dailekh and Bajhang were the alternatives. In the end the staff at the PSU suggested that I would go to Achham:

\[215\] E-mail correspondence PSU 7.2.2008.
\[216\] The VDC selection had been made on following list of criteria: 1) Poverty Status; 2) Percentage of excluded groups; 3) Women’s illiteracy and relative number of single women; 4) Remoteness from road-head (distance); 5) Situation of water resources facilities e.g. drinking water & sanitation, energy/hydropower and irrigation (availability/coverage of services). In the case that all other criteria were similar, the recommendation had been that adjoining VDCs should be selected (clustering) to better cover watershed areas and to make project work and monitoring easier. Annual Report, Financial Year 1, UM 93.20 NEP, Nepal: Maaseudun vesi- ja sanaattiohankes (Kathmandu and Helsinki: Government of Nepal, Ministry of Local Development and Government of the Republic of Finland, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2007).
PSU employee: Achham rose in our discussions as number one, since it is remarkably backward and there have been problems [in implementation] there too. In addition to this there is a reasonably good road connection [to the district headquarter, Mangalsen].²¹⁷

3.2 Narrativity in research: the narrative turn – or return?

In this chapter I will shed light on the pluralistic and often rather confusing world of narrativity and the way in which it relates to research. The more specific purpose of this section is to unveil the implications that choosing the path of narrativity as a central denominator of my research design has meant for this study. First I will take a brief look at narrative research as a representation of the broader narrative turn in social sciences. Following this, I will look to what is meant by contemporary narrative inquiry²¹⁸ and define my take on it in the framework of this study. Central to this are the uses of narrativity in academic discourse as an ontological and epistemological presumption, a form of data, a practical tool, and a method of analysis²¹⁹. In the process of defining my research design, I found myself leaning toward a narrative mode of cognition, and thus narrative analysis (as opposed to analysis of narratives). I will therefore discuss at somewhat more length the aspect of narrativity as a method of analysis, and present Polkinghorne’s development of guidelines, which I have adopted as the basis for conducting a narrative analysis in the framework of this study.

Whereas the traditions of narrativity lie within the fields of philosophy, literary science and linguistics, today’s narrative research can be placed within the framework of a broader cultural phenomenon referred to as the narrative turn; a shift from information society to narrative society. In the narrative society, processes of knowing are understood as being based on producing and listening to narratives. According to this perspective what we know about ourselves and the world we live in, is understood as being constructed through narratives.²²⁰ The

²¹⁷ E-mail correspondence PSU 7.2.2008.
²¹⁸ I use the terms narrative research and narrative inquiry synonymously.
²²⁰ Hannu L. T. Heikkinen, Whatever is Narrative Research? (https://www.jyu.fi/hum/aineistot/tutkijakoulu/Narrative.pdf; University of Jyväskylä, Doctoral
notion of “narrative turn” does not refer to a homogeneous movement of thought with a distinct lineage of ideas nor a shared canon of essential works. On the contrary, there seems to be more polyphony than anything else, and there is hardly any one text, discussion or discipline that has inspired all narrative turn authors in the social sciences.221 The entrance of narrative into the social sciences (and psychology) has instead been based more on a general shared criticism of the hegemonic epistemological stance.222

The narrative turn has been described as being connected on the one hand to a paradigm shift from realism toward constructivism223, and a cultural shift from modernism to postmodernism on the other. Respectively, the paradigmatic shift toward constructivism implies that human knowledge is no longer regarded as a “grand narrative,” which draws together coherent and universal views on reality. Rather, reality is thought of being constantly under construction and being constitutive of a plurality of small narratives, local and personal in nature. Constructivism further holds that there is no single dominant reality, but rather a number of different realities that are constructed in individuals' minds through their social interactions. Knowledge is thus considered as being relative, dependent upon time, place and the position of the observer.224

The cultural shift toward postmodernism, in turn, implies a critique of dualistic thinking, and a blurring of lines between what is considered scientific as opposed to artistic expression. According to a postmodern conception, cognition is the knowledge of some knowing subject who lives within a specific social and physical


222 Hyvärinen, An Introduction to Narrative Travels. Epistemology may be understood as a theory about knowledge, about who can know what and under what circumstances. All epistemologies involve assumptions about the knower(s), the known and processes of knowing. Positivism, with its focus on objectivity and elimination of the role of subjective judgments and interpretations, is the hegemonic epistemology in scientific discourse that is referred to here. See e.g. Joey Sprague and Diane Kobryniewicz, "A Feminist Epistemology," in Handbook of the Sociology of Gender, ed. Janet Saltzman Chafetz (New York: Springer, 2006) 25-26.


224Heikkinen, Whatever is Narrative Research?; Heikkinen, Narratiivinen tutkimus - todellisuus kertomuksena 118.
environment. Knowledge is thus conceived of as being dynamic and originating from connections of understanding related to the individual’s experience through their role in a social and physical setting and their experiences of certain lived lives in that environment. Whereas modernist science holds to a conception of meta-narratives that sustain the image of objectivism and neutrality through the use of rhetorical means (e.g. by using the passive form in writing), the postmodern way subscribes to first person accounts in research reporting, placing emphasis on bringing out the narrator’s voice and paying attention to issues of empowerment.\textsuperscript{225}

The growing enthusiasm toward the use of stories and narratives in research across disciplines is often referred to as constituting a narrative turn within the social sciences. The narrative trend has been characterized as a change in the culture of knowing, which not only affects the orientation of various disciplines, but also the interrelationships between disciplines. Quoting Chamberlayne et al, Leena Syrjälä for instance states that the narrative turn is a matter of paradigm change; a subjective and cultural turn where personal and social meanings gain ground as the basis of people’s action. On the other hand, she claims that rather than a turn to something completely new, the interest in using stories and narratives in research could instead be coined as a return to something once discovered and known, and then forgotten. The predecessors of today’s narrative research include the Chicago School sociologists as well as anthropologists from the 1920s and 1930s who used life stories and biographies actively as part of other qualitative and humanistic research methods. A contemporary of the Chicago School, the Polish sociologist Florian Znanieck is also often mentioned as a central pioneer in the field. However, just as soon as the focus on narratives had been found, it seems to have been forgotten. During the 1940s and 1950s, mainstream Northern American sociology favored abstract theory along with statistical and survey methods, marginalizing the use of life histories in research.\textsuperscript{226}

By listening to previously silenced voices, feminist researchers challenged social science knowledge about history, society and culture. This interest in women’s personal narratives was accompanied by feminist challenges to conventional assumptions about research relationships and methods. Resisting the idea that

\textsuperscript{225}Heikkinen, \textit{Whatever is Narrative Research?}

personal narratives were primarily useful for gathering information about events, change or the impact of social structures on individual’s lives, feminists were interested in women as social actors in their own right and in the subjective meanings that women assigned to events and conditions in their lives. This perspective opened up new understandings of social, cultural and historical processes. Further, and crucially in terms of methodology, feminists began to consider the role that researchers’ interests and social locations play in research relationships. Whose questions should get asked and answered? Who gets to have the last word? What about issues of power in the research relationship? Pertinently for contemporary narrative research, feminists started to incorporate postmodern influences into their work and ask questions about voice, authenticity, interpretive authority, and representation.  

Bochner’s account of the narrative turn as representing both a turn away from as well as toward something, is helpful in summarizing the notion of the narrative turn, and has served me with an entry point with which to relate narrativity to this research:

The narrative turn moves away from a singular, monolithic conception of social science toward a pluralism that promotes multiple forms of representation and research; away from facts and toward meanings; away from master narratives and toward local stories; away from idolizing categorical thought and abstracted theory and toward embracing the values of irony, emotionality, and activism; away from assuming the stance of the disinterested spectator and toward assuming the posture of a feeling, embodied, and vulnerable observer; away from writing essays and toward telling stories.  

I perceive this turn away from a singular conception of social science as being first and foremost about turning toward plurality within what is accepted as credible IR research, as opposed to constituting any new forms of exclusion within the discipline. In a similar vein Christine Sylvester’s discussion of “camps” in IR and suggestion to construct IR collages provides a way to describe my research in the

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227 Chase 654-655.
multi-/inter-disciplinary terrain\textsuperscript{230} that my topic is situated in. She speaks of “constructing collages wherein differences, even seeming incommensurability's, are put together into compositions that suggest locations and links as yet unexplored.”\textsuperscript{231} Choosing to go by way of narrative inquiry in IR does not necessarily need to be a question of either or; of rejecting the validity of knowledge produced through a different paradigm from mine. Instead, I have opted to seeing it as both is better. In other words, I view the possible “facts” or previous knowledge concerning my research topic assembled so far within IR or peace, conflict and development studies, or policy discourse – i.e. the prevailing master narratives and abstracted theories – as forming a backdrop to my awareness of what it means (or takes) to engage in development cooperation in a conflict-affected context. Simultaneously, however, through adopting a narrative approach in this study, I have made an effort to keep an open mind to the possibility of putting new emphasis on understanding, meanings, local stories and activism by individuals in that same thematic sphere. In Bochner’s words, I have chosen to position myself as an interested, feeling, embodied and vulnerable participant who has co-constructed a story of aid in fragility (or rather: Finnish bilateral development intervention in conflict-affected Nepal) together with the other participants of this case study. In this way, this study takes on an approach through which individuals are perceived (and empowered) as legitimate and valuable “knowers” within the realm of IR.

3.2.1 Defining my take on contemporary narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry has gained increasing interest among qualitative researchers in the past few decades. By the same token, the field of narrative research is a continuously evolving field rich and diffuse in tradition; divided into several orientations within various disciplines, multiple methodologies in various stages of development, and consisting of plenty of opportunities for exploring new ideas, methods, and questions.\textsuperscript{232} Susan Chase for example presents narrative inquiry as a particular type of qualitative inquiry, a way of making sense out of past experiences:

\textsuperscript{230} For a discussion of placing “conflict and development” in disciplinary debates, see O’Gorman, Conflict and development 8-13.

\textsuperscript{231} Sylvester, Whither the International at the End of IR.

\textsuperscript{232} Syrjälä, Elämäkerrat ja tarinat tutkimuksessa; Linda M. Johnston, ”Narrative Analysis,” in Doing Research: Methods of Inquiry for Conflict Analysis, ed. Daniel Druckman (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE
[Narrative is] a way of understanding one’s own and others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of action and events over time.\textsuperscript{233}

Chase further characterizes narrative inquiry as “an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods” – all of which revolve around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the ones who live them. Much in line with this, Hannu Heikkinen\textsuperscript{234} views narrativity as a fragmented formation of research related to narratives and a loose frame of reference, characterized by its attention being focused on narratives. As such, he defines four uses of narrativity in scientific discussions as 1) an ontological and epistemological presumption; 2) a form of data; 3) a practical tool; and 4) a method of analysis.\textsuperscript{235}

I have used this division in configuring my path of using narrativity in this research. In order to reveal to the reader my take on contemporary narrative inquiry thus adopted, I will next discuss each one of the abovementioned categories in somewhat more detail.

**Narrativity as an Ontological and Epistemological Presumption**

The significance of narrativity to research is most profoundly presented in discussions about the ultimate nature of qualitative research.\textsuperscript{236} As mentioned above in the discussion of the narrative turn, the epistemological and ontological

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\textsuperscript{233} Chase 656-657, 651.

\textsuperscript{234} Heikkinen, *Whatever is Narrative Research?*

\textsuperscript{235} Heikkinen’s numbering of the four dimensions of narrativity is different from what I am using here. The numbering from 1 to 4 does not have any indication as to the importance of each aspect of narrativity as explained by Heikkinen, rather it is merely a practical question of sequencing suitable for this chapter. The fourth point (narrativity as a method of analysis) leads to a longer discussion essential for this dissertation, which is why it has been discussed last.

\textsuperscript{236} Ibid.
presumptions that narrativity is most often connected to are constructivism and postmodernism. Postmodern work on epistemology is diverse and cannot be summarized easily as its central tenet is one seeking to overthrow all preceding positions on epistemology\textsuperscript{237}. Nevertheless, some basic lines might be drawn. Whereas the modernistic approach to research strives for objective, universal, generalizable scientific knowledge that is freed from any effects of time, people and context, the postmodern stance takes the whole idea of value and context free knowledge as an illusion. Postmodernism rejects the possibility of there being only one reality with only one truth about it, and offers to replace the ideals of objectivism and universalism with the ideas of relative and contextual knowing; the necessary inter-linkages between knowing and certain perspectives, times and places and social contexts.\textsuperscript{238} In this sense then, according to a narrative research approach, instead of being a one and only truth about reality, this research report too is to be considered as contextual knowing from a certain perspective and more as a narrative product in itself than as a document of reality.

What about constructivism then? Despite multiple co-existing trends of constructivism, some basic ideas may be identified that are common to constructivist theories. From an ontological point of view, constructivism presents to us a holistic view of the world and the human being: individuals are seen as part of their organic, social and symbolic contexts and systems. Following from this, one of the basic ideas of constructivism is that knowing and knowledge is created in interaction with the social and/or broader cultural environment. In other words, “the constructivist view on knowing and reality is adaptive, active and pluralistic.”\textsuperscript{239} As an orientation to research, constructivism attempts to illuminate the context of experience and the idea of multiple realities.\textsuperscript{240} Its emphasis is on people constructing their knowledge about the world as well as their own identities through narratives. From this perspective, what we know about the world and ourselves then, is thought of as an eternally evolving story that is constantly changing and being built and rebuilt, and as being relative to time, space and our interactions with other people. Following Bruner, who claims that narratives are

\textsuperscript{238} Heikkinen, Narratiivinen tutkimus - todellisuus kertomuksena.
\textsuperscript{239} Tuula Siljanen, Narratives of Expatriates in the Middle East: Adaptation, Identity and Learning in Non-Profit Organizations (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2007) 27.
\textsuperscript{240} Druckman, Doing Research: Methods of Inquiry for Conflict Analysis 6.
versions of reality that operate as instruments of the mind in the construction of reality.\textsuperscript{241} I view narrativity in research as working in two directions: stories, narratives and accounts of the world are both the starting point for my research as well as its envisioned end result.\textsuperscript{242} In other words, the archival and project documents as well as the interview data studied for this research were produced by people who organized their experience and knowledge into narratives through their own meaning systems and in interaction with the organic, social and political context of the bilateral development intervention between Finland and Nepal. The reality that the dataset expresses and constructs is subjective; and I have taken part in the construction of the narratives within the interview data, in my role as researcher. Through the process of narrative analysis, as will be discussed below, I have also constructed a narrative of my own in the attempt to come to an understanding of the research topic at hand, and in explicating it to the reader. Knowledge carried by stories in this way differs from that which has traditionally been promoted by the Western scientific tradition\textsuperscript{243} and mainstream IR. Following Bruner, however, my claim is that narrative knowledge should be taken as more than mere emotive expression in this study: it is to be considered a legitimate form of reasoned knowing.\textsuperscript{244}

**Narratives as verbal action and form of data**

Narrative researchers often view narratives as verbal action: as doing something through which events are explained, entertained, informed, defended, complained, confirmed or challenged. Whatever the particular action then, when someone tells a story it is perceived as the narrator shaping, constructing and performing the self, experience and reality.\textsuperscript{245} Understood broadly, narrativity denotes any prosaic use of language as opposed to numerical or short answer type of data. Here the

\textsuperscript{241} Also Ricoeur claims that stories are "models for the re-description of the world...But the story is not by itself the model. It is...an instantiation of models we carry in our own minds." (Ricoeur quoted in Bruner 1986, 7).

\textsuperscript{242} Heikkinen, *Narrattivinen tutkimus - todellisuus kertomuksena*; Siljanen, *Narratives of Expatriates in the Middle East: Adaptation, Identity and Learning in Non-Profit Organizations*.

\textsuperscript{243} Polkinghorne, *Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis* 8.

\textsuperscript{244} Jerome Seymour Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986); Polkinghorne, *Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis*.

\textsuperscript{245} Chase 657.
meaning of narrative as prosaic text refers to all data that is in the form of natural speech or discourse such as interview protocols, free responses to open-ended questions, diary texts, autobiographies, project reports etc. without any specific criteria or sequence, coherence or plot structures.  

Following Ricouer, Polkinghorne claims that work with narrative as stories holds significant promise for qualitative research in that stories are particularly suited as the linguistic form in which human experience as lived can be expressed. In this sense, narratives as a form of data are used to signify stories where events and actions are drawn together into an organized whole or unified episode – with a beginning, middle and ending – by means of a plot that develops with time. Polkinghorne maintains that stories express a kind of knowledge that uniquely describes human experience in which actions and happenings contribute positively and/or negatively to attaining certain goals and fulfilling specific purposes. The storied narrative can be perceived as…

…the linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts. In this context, story refers not only to fictional accounts but also to narrative describing ‘ideal’ life events such as biographies, autobiographies, histories, case studies, and reports of remembered episodes that have occurred.

The data gathered for this research project on a development intervention in a conflict-affected context is in part narrative in the more general, narrative as prosaic text –sense of the term described above, and in part consists also of interviews, which may be perceived as storied narratives. The findings of this research are in turn configured as storied narrative in the sense described by Polkinghorne. In Chase’s words then, it is not only the dataset of this study, but also the outcome of this research that can be seen as the “narrators shaping, constructing, and performing the self, experience and reality.”

In conclusion here, what Heikkinen claims is important in discussing narratives as a form of research data, is to note that different types of datasets

246 Ibid.; Heikkinen, Narratiivinen tutkimus - todellisuus kertomuksena.
247 Polkinghorne 7.
248 Polkinghorne, Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis 7.
249 Chase, Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lens, Approaches, Voices.
250 Heikkinen, Narratiivinen tutkimus - todellisuus kertomuksena 122.
require different modes of thought and analysis. This is particularly the case and easily conceivable when comparing numerical to linguistic data, but is not irrelevant for an inspection of appropriate ways of approaching short-answer versus narrative data either. Whereas even short-answer type linguistic data may be classifiable and presentable in lists and categories, narrative data – whether conceived broadly as prosaic text or more precisely as stories – cannot unambiguously be condensed into numbers and categories, but rather always requires further interpretation and analysis. With this in mind, I have attempted to follow Chase\textsuperscript{251} in paying attention, while studying the interview data, to each narrator’s voice in conducting the narrative analysis, aiming to recognize not only what is being communicated but also how the narrator communicates it. I have further attempted to keep focus on the social locations from which each narrator is speaking. It is the combination of the what, how and where that I understand as making each narrator’s voice particular. By treating narration as actively creative and particular in this way, it has been possible to try to move away from the mere factuality of each narrator’s statements, highlighting also (or sometimes instead) the various versions of self, reality, and/or experience that each storyteller produced through the telling.

**Narrative as (a practical tool or) a question of reflexivity (?)**

A third aspect of narrativity as used in scientific discourse refers to their use as a practical and professional tool in fields such as psychotherapy, pedagogy, health care, business leadership, social work, rehabilitation etc. Many practical applications used in these fields are based on the idea that people need to continually construct and reconstruct their identities in the postmodern societal and cultural situation. When narratives are viewed through their practical significance, the exact and detailed truthfulness of the stories is not what is most central. More important is to create a story which functions in a way that helps the individuals in question to move on with a life crisis or simply to adopt new ways of working. The purpose of research, however, is usually thought to be the production of valid and truthful information\textsuperscript{252}. In this sense the use of narratives as a practical professional tool is

\textsuperscript{251} Chase 657.

\textsuperscript{252} In his discussion of the properties of narrative, Bruner proposes *factual indifference* as one of the main characteristics of narratives. He claims that narrative can be ‘real’ or ‘imaginary’ without loss of its power as a story; therefore narrative as such is factually indifferent. For Bruner it is the sequence of the sentences within a narrative (rather than their truth or falsity) that determines the overall
significantly different from their use as a way to conduct research. Following Heikkinen, I have considered it important in the framework of this research, nevertheless, to be aware of the possible (“therapeutic,”) empowering and/or change facilitative potential of narratives when conducting research in order not to – unintentionally – confuse the two modes of telling stories with one another.  

These considerations link to what is discussed below in the section on “The principle of simultaneity – or research as intervention” in the section on appreciative inquiry; and will be presented through examples from my research process. The idea of research as intervention relates also to Polkinghorne’s call for the need for the narrative researcher to engage in a discussion of researcher positionality and the effect thereof on the outcome of the analysis. This is a task I will attend to in a separate section below. Also related to what has been discussed here, underlying this study has further been a sense of reflexivity in research. In other words, I consider this research project as constituting in some sense an intervention in and of itself, in addition to being an exercise of self-identity. Just as it would be impossible for me to step in to a puddle of water without producing so much as a ripple or splash and then finally being in the puddle, I understand it similarly as impossible for me to conduct research on a case of Finnish development intervention conducted in a conflict-affect context without having some kind of effect on it, leaving a trace or footprint of some kind, or that it would leave me un-affected as the researcher and person that I am.


253 Heikkinen, Narratiivinen tutkimus - todellisuus kertomuksena 126.


Narrative analysis

A further use of the notion of narrativity in research, which has been most central for this study, refers to how (storied) narrative data is treated during the course of a research process.\textsuperscript{257} In this respect, Donald E. Polkinghorne defines two primary kinds of narrative inquiry as 1) analysis of narratives and 2) narrative analysis.\textsuperscript{258} These two ways of approaching narrative data correspond in turn to two distinct modes of thought, as defined by Jerome Bruner.\textsuperscript{259} He conceptualizes two basic modes of cognitive functioning, through which the ordering of experience and constructing of reality may happen, respectively as a) paradigmatic or logico-scientific cognition and b) narrative cognition. He claims that the two modes of thought are irreducible to one another; that they “…do not talk much to each other.” He claims that they differ from one another in their procedures of verification,\textsuperscript{260} operating principles and criteria of well formedness.\textsuperscript{261} On the other hand, Bruner maintains that there is complementarity between the two modes of cognition, and that efforts to ignore one mode over the other, fail to capture the rich diversity of thought. Polkinghorne explains that although paradigmatic cognition has traditionally been held as the exclusive mode for the generation of trustworthy and valid knowledge, both kinds of cognitions generate useful and valid knowledge in their own way. Referring to Gadamer, he claims that both paradigmatic and narrative cognition are part of the human cognitive repertoire for reasoning about and making sense of encounters with oneself, others, and the material realm. But what then is the significance of Bruner’s contribution whereby he identifies two distinct modes of thought? The “expansion of ways of knowing beyond the singular mode advocated by the received tradition to include the narrative mode”, claims

\textsuperscript{257} Heikkinen, \textit{Narratiivinen tutkimus - todellisuus kertomuksena.}

\textsuperscript{258} Polkinghorne.

\textsuperscript{259} Bruner, \textit{Actual Minds, Possible Worlds} 11.

\textsuperscript{260} Whereas the paradigmatic mode of thought relies on procedures for establishing formal and empirical proof, or \textit{truth} as its process of verification; the narrative mode of thought relies on establishing \textit{verisimilitude}. (Bruner 1986, 11) The Random House Dictionary defines verisimilitude as 1. the appearance of truth 2. Something having the appearance of truth. The Finnish language terms for verisimilitude are “todentuntuisuus”/“todennäköisyys.”

\textsuperscript{261} In terms of criteria of well formedness, Bruner (ibid.) claims that whereas a good story convinces its reader of its lifelikeness, a well-formed argument convinces of its truth. The two are different natural kinds, both of which can be used as means for convincing another – what they convince of, however, is fundamentally different.

\textsuperscript{262} Polkinghorne, \textit{Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis} 9.
Polkinghorne. Before discussing narrative analysis as the chosen type of narrative inquiry used in this study, I will first take a brief look at the mode of thought to which it is connected.

Bruner\textsuperscript{263} presents \textit{paradigmatic cognition} as attempting to fulfill the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation, employing categorization and conceptualization.\textsuperscript{264} This mode of thinking focuses on what makes an item in question a member of a certain category, instead of looking to what makes it different from other members of that category. In this sense paradigmatic thought links the particular to the formal.\textsuperscript{265} In contrast to the paradigmatic mode of thought, this study is based on \textit{narrative cognition}, or storied knowing. Bruner\textsuperscript{266} portrays proponents of the latter as “bottom-up partisans” who choose to focus on a particular piece of work (storied narrative) taken as a fragment of reality and explore it in order to reconstruct or deconstruct it. The effort for the bottom-up partisan is then to read a text for its meanings, and to “elucidate the art” of its author or narrator. Instead of being a quest to prove or disprove a theory, the narrative mode of thought aims to explore the world of a particular narrative data. Narrative cognition aims specifically at understanding human or human-like intention and action as well as the changes and consequences that mark their course.\textsuperscript{267} Human action is thought of here as being the outcome of the interaction of a person’s previous learning and experiences, present-situated presses, and proposed goals and purposes. Unlike objects (as in a flat tire of a car being easily replaceable with a new one), human actions are perceived as unique and thus not fully replicable. Whereas paradigmatic knowledge is focused on what is common among human actions, narrative knowledge focuses on the particular and special characteristics of each individual action and event, while noticing the differences and diversity of people’s behavior. It strives to locate experience in time and place\textsuperscript{268}, attending to the temporal context and various interactions of the elements that make each situation unique, aiming to capture the richness and nuances of meaning in human affairs. Quoting Carr, Polkinghorne notes that such “richness and nuance cannot be expressed in definitions, statements of fact or

\textsuperscript{263} Bruner \textit{Actual Minds, Possible Worlds} 9-10.
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid. 12.
\textsuperscript{265} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{266} Bruner \textit{Actual Minds, Possible Worlds} 10.
\textsuperscript{267} Bruner \textit{Actual Minds, Possible Worlds} 13; Polkinghorne 11, ref. Mitchell and Ricouer.
\textsuperscript{268} Bruner \textit{Actual Minds, Possible Worlds} 13.
abstract propositions.” Again, in contrast to paradigmatic knowledge, which is maintained in individual words that name a concept, narrative knowledge is maintained in emplotted stories. The idea here is that it is precisely through storied memories that it is possible to retain the complexity of the situation in which certain actions were undertaken as well as the emotional and motivational meanings connected to them. Polkinghorne describes how narrative cognition can bring about understanding through affect: hearing (or reading) a storied description about a person’s involvement in a specific episode of life touches us in a way so as to evoke emotions of sympathy, anger, sadness or joy. Also Bruner speaks on this referring to Ricoeur who claims that stories reach sad, comic or absurd denouements, whereas theoretical arguments are simply conclusive or inconclusive. Through its ability to evoke emotions then, narrative cognition provides us with explanatory knowledge of why a person acted in a specific way; it makes others’ actions, as well as our own, understandable.

Further, narrative cognition produces a series of anecdotal descriptions of particular incidents, with the cumulative effect of narrative reasoning being a collection of individual cases where thought moves from case to case as opposed to from case to generalization. How does this collection of storied experiences help us in our potential attempt to understand new actions or episodes within a similar thematic realm then? By providing a basis for understanding by means of analogy, claims Polkinghorne. The concern is not to identify a potential new episode as similar to a specific storied one. Instead, the understanding of the new action (a new case) can draw upon previous understanding while being open to the specific and unique elements that make the new episode different from all that have been seen or heard of before. Whereas paradigmatic thought has the potential to result in logical proof, empirical discovery, solid theory and sound argumentation, Bruner claims that imaginative use of narrative cognition in turn strives to put timeless miracles into particulars of experience, and can thereby lead to good stories, gripping drama as well as believable historical accounts.

Following Polkinghorne’s account, one’s approach to handling narrative data can be seen as determined by the perspective we choose to subscribe to in terms of how we claim to know about the world. As I have noted above, Polkinghorne presents a taxonomy of different kinds of narrative inquiry and introduces two

269 Ibid.
270 Bruner Actual Minds, Possible Worlds 13-14.
271 Ibid.
272 Bruner Actual Minds, Possible Worlds 13.
primary types that correspond to the two kinds of cognition – paradigmatic and narrative – as proposed by Bruner. Inquiry that employs paradigmatic reasoning in its analysis is then conceptualized as analysis of narratives, and the type that employs narrative reasoning as narrative analysis. The two are categorically different ways of conducting research.\textsuperscript{273} Analysis of narratives entails the collection of stories as data and analyzing them with paradigmatic processes and criteria. The focus is on classifying narrative data into different categories for instance according to case types and metaphors, resulting in description of themes that hold across the dataset, or in taxonomies of types of stories, characters, or settings. The point is to identify particulars as instances of general notions or concepts, and to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data. In other words, the analysis of narratives moves from stories to common elements. The strength of paradigmatic procedures of this kind is their “capacity to develop general knowledge about a collection of stories. This kind of knowledge, however, is abstract and formal, and by necessity underplays the unique and particular aspects of each story.”\textsuperscript{274}

In this research project I have been intrigued to configure my path of narrativity in research by taking the route pointing toward narrative analysis. In this approach, based on narrative cognition, the emphasis has been on producing a new story based on the dataset collected for the research project. First, I collected descriptions of events and happenings related to the Rural Village Water Resources Management case study project through project documentation, archival material and stakeholder interviews, and then I have configured them by means of a plot into a case study narrative, or what Polkinghorne calls “an em plotted narrative\textsuperscript{275}.” By configuring the data elements into a story, my objective as a researcher has been not only to bring forth and unveil central themes from within the collected dataset, but also to unite and give meaning to the data as a case of aid in fragility. The analytic task of conducting narrative analysis “requires the researcher to develop or discover a plot that displays the linkage among the data elements as parts of an unfolding temporal development culminating in the denouement.” The configuration of the data cannot, however, impose just any em plotted order on it. The final story must fit the data, while simultaneously bringing an order and meaningfulness that is not

\textsuperscript{273} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{274} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{275} Polkinghorne mentions histories, case studies and biographic episodes as examples of em plotted narratives.
apparent in the data set in itself.\textsuperscript{276} I will return to this point in more detail in the part of this chapter discussing the guidelines for configuring a narrative analysis.

Polkinghorne\textsuperscript{277} claims that unlike narrative inquiry of the paradigmatic type, the data employed in the narrative analytic type are usually not (or necessarily) in storied form. Instead, the data elements required for this type of analysis are various kinds of historical description of events and happenings, which are then composed or rather integrated and interpreted by the researcher into a story. This is also the case with this study. I initially approached my dataset, following Polkinghorne, with general questions such as “are contextual instabilities or fragility somehow present?” and “how did this happen/come about?” I then looked for pieces of information that could contribute to the construction of a story that provides explanations to the broader question asked. The bits and pieces of information for this type of research typically come from a variety of sources, including interviews, journals, public and personal documents, as well as observations. The more specific nature of the data depends on the focus of the research. In general, however, Polkinghorne claims that narrative analysis demands the selection of what he refers to as a “bounded system” for study. Referring to Stake, he claims that some kind of outlines or boundaries concerning the system being studied should be clear: “The bounded system can be two years in the life of a child…, the first years of the development of a company, or an academic year for a teacher…” The data sought is then that which relates to the particular system under study, emphasis being on data that reveals the uniqueness and provides understanding of the distinct complexity of the chosen bounded system or case.\textsuperscript{278} The idea of a bounded system relates to what is coined in case study research as defining the unit of analysis.\textsuperscript{279}

Although the collection of data may occur while the researched episode is still in process, Polkinghorne maintains that the configurative narrative analysis is typically produced after the storied events have occurred. This was precisely the order of progress in my research as well: part of the data was collected during the time that the case study project was still in operation (2006-2010), while the analysis thereof has been conducted after its ending. Following Polkinghorne,\textsuperscript{280} I

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\textsuperscript{276} Polkinghorne 15-16.
\textsuperscript{277} Polkinghorne 15.
\textsuperscript{278} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{279} Yin, \textit{Case Study Research: Design and Methods} 21-26.
\textsuperscript{280} Polkinghorne 19.
\end{flushleft}
have not only produced a description of action through this narrative analysis, but have also — in a sense — engaged in the process of writing history. Even though the elements of data may reflect the thoughts and intentions of the actors of the case study at the time they happened, in the analysis phase these elements have been transformed into historical data. The resulting narrative analysis of my research is in some sense a transcription of the intentions, thoughts and actions of the actors and stakeholders of the studied development intervention. But it is also a means of making sense and showing the significance of these intentions, thoughts and actions in the context of the final denouement. In such a storied outcome of narrative inquiry, I consider myself a co-narrator of the story; I have aimed to tell the story in my own voice, but simultaneously in a way so as to let the voices of the participants of the study be heard as clearly as possible in their own right.

The process of narrative analysis in this study can be described as more of a synthesizing than separating endeavor, whereby I have attempted to organize the data elements into a coherent account. In the process of analysis I have attempted to relate actions and events of my case study to one another, treating them as contributors to a plot. The story thus constructed through narrative integration incorporates notions of human purpose and choice as well as chance happenings, dispositions as well as environmental bearings and constraints. The result is a retrospective explanation linking past events together to account for how a final outcome with regard to the focal theme might have come about. Shelley Day Sclater in turn refers to narrative analysis as a way of finding out about how people frame, remember and report their experiences. She considers narrative analysis as a way of generating knowledge that disrupts old certainties and allows us to glimpse into the complexities of human lives, selves and endeavors. Following Rustin, in addition to illuminating individual lives, she sees narrative analysis as shedding light on broader social processes.

In the context of this study, the narrative analysis has synthesized into an account of whether or not and how it was that the chosen bilateral development intervention carried out in a conflict-affected context (Rural Village Water Resources Management Project in Nepal’s Western and Far Western regions) was affected by and took into consideration its conflict-affected operational context. In the analysis, I have attempted to take into consideration the temporal and evolving

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281 Polkinghorne 16.
dimension of human experience by organizing the events found in the broader dataset along a chronological continuum. Polkinghorne suggests making use of various kinds of plots as organizing templates, such as the most basic types of “tragic” and “comedy” plots. The first of these alludes to stories where the intended goal is not achieved, and the second to stories where the goal is achieved. Prior to the final outcome of the configured narrative, several variations may exist within the two basic types of plots dealing with movements in the narrative, either toward the goal of the plot (satisfaction) or away from it (disappointment). Noteworthy here, particularly in terms of the nature of this research process, has been the inherent movement between the gathered data and the emerging thematic plot. As far as possible, I tried to keep open the final plot idea during the course of the analysis process, and when major events or actions described in the data ended up conflicting with or contradicting it then the plot was adapted in order to better make sense of the data elements and their relationships. I started out in this research process with the idea of a certain kind of curve along the timeline of the project as to how I presumed the conflict-affected context to be present in the data. As will be shown in the course of this dissertation, I ended up with a similar, but more nuanced picture of the curve in the final denouement. I will explain this in more detail in chapter eight.

Polkinghorne explains the cyclical development of a plot as following the same principles of understanding that are often described by the notion of the hermeneutic circle. As the plot begins to take form in the course of the analysis process, the events and happenings (and thus also data elements) crucial to the story’s conclusion become apparent. The emerging plot itself has thus informed me about which particular items from the gathered dataset to include in the final storied account.

As first developed in ancient rhetoric and later elaborated by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) in nineteenth-century hermeneutics, the notion of the hermeneutic circle “refers to the nature and means of interpreting a text. The circle signified a methodological process or condition of understanding, namely, that coming to understand the meaning of the whole of a text and coming to understand its parts were always interdependent activities. Construing the meaning of the whole meant making sense of the parts, and grasping the meaning of the parts depended on having some sense of the whole.” See The SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry (http://srmo.sagepub.com/view/the-sage-dictionary-of-qualitative-inquiry/n148.xml): SAGE Publications, 2007).

Typically, not all elements are needed for telling of the story. Spence (referred to by Polkinghorne 1995, 16) calls leaving out elements of data that do not contradict, but equally are not pertinent to the development of the story “narrative smoothing”. Heikkinen, Huttunen, and Kakkori (1999, 47)
any order on the data, claims Polkinghorne. Therefore, I have in this research too, attempted to make sure that the final constructed story fits as well as possible in particular to the chronology of the data while simultaneously holding the possibility open to bringing an order and meaningfulness that is not necessarily apparent in the dataset itself.286

The function of narrative analysis is to answer how and why a particular outcome came about. In the context of this research, the function has been to look at whether or not, how and why the planning and implementation of a certain development intervention took into consideration the conflict-affected operational context. This research is further an attempt to bring forth and understand individual persons as legitimate actors and knowers within the realm of International Relations (IR), as they have acted in the concrete social world.287 In this sense, the storied outcome of my research is a retrospective narrative explanation of development aid in a conflict-affected setting. The credibility of the analysis thus produced is in its ability to clarify the uncertainties implied in the research task. In other words, it is ultimately up to the reader to determine whether or not the retrospective narrative explanation constructed in this dissertation is able to elucidate how the conflict-affected context interact with the design and implementation of infrastructural development cooperation. According to Polkinghorne this means that the explanation needs to satisfy the subjective needs of the reader of the research report to understand how things could have turned

Also discuss selection of data elements as part of constructing narratives; they claim that selection is an integral part of emplotment (juonellistaminen). Referring to David Carr, they further note that through the theme of selectivity it is possible also to realize the power involved in constructing narratives/stories. Molly Andrews also speaks to this point in asking why some stories are selected while others are ignored in the construction of any specific narrative: “We choose certain facts, and hope that they will speak for us, through us. But what do we think we will achieve by telling our stories in the way that we do, to the people we do? What is it that makes us interpret the events of our time in one way and not the other? Who do we perceive ourselves as being in relation to those events? How actively are we engaged in trying to shape our political environment? …” Andrews links this discussion to a question of researcher positionality and reflexivity, claiming that stories are never told in a vacuum, and that we as researchers never simply tabulate information gathered: “Rather, we feed into the process at every level, and our subjectivity is always a part of that which we are documenting.” See Andrews (2007, 2-3). Positionality will be discussed in more detail in later sections of this research report.

286 Polkinghorne 5-23.
287 Following Molly Andrews, “…I am convinced that there is a profound sense in which the personal is political and the political is personal.” See, Andrews 2.
out the way they did. In Ricouer’s terms, “the story has to appeal to the reader’s experienced general sense of how and why humans respond and act.”

3.2.2 Constructing a retrospective historical narrative

I will next describe a set of seven guidelines for developing narratives stipulated by Polkinghorne, and reflect on the way in which I have applied them to this study. Polkinghorne’s guidelines are based on Dollard’s criteria for judging life history, dating to 1935. Although written several decades ago, these criteria have proven to still be applicable and useful as guides in generating a case study from gathered data.

1. “The researcher must include a description of the cultural context in which the storied case study takes place.” This point is based on the notion that particular meanings of events are provided by cultural heritage; i.e. assumptions about the acceptable as well as expected goals are both maintained by the social environment, and normal strategies for achieving these goals are in turn sustained by the milieu. In configuring the story then, Polkinghorne claims that the researcher needs to be attentive to the contextual features that give specific meanings to events so that their contributions to the plot can be understood. In terms of this study on Finnish bilateral development cooperation in conflict-affected Nepal, I have deemed it necessary to be attentive to the context of the studied intervention in a broad sense. In other words, not only has it been important to acquire a basic level of understanding of the conflict-affected Nepalese context and the immediate political and social context of the intervention, but it has also been crucial to have some grasp of the professional/institutional history of the intervention as a case of bilateral development cooperation, as well as the policy framework in which this case study project was carried out. In order to arrive at an understanding of these dimensions, I have provided a description of this case study from the perspective of three

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288 Polkinghorne 19.
289 Polkinghorne 5-23.
290 John Dollard defined these criteria in his book *Criteria for the life history, with analyses of six notable documents* (1935).
291 Polkinghorne 16.
292 Polkinghorne 16.
different contexts: the broader policy context guiding Finnish development cooperation at the time of designing and implementation of the studied project; conflict-affected Nepal (with particular focus on the selected case-within-case area of Achham and Bhatakatiya the Far West); and finally what I have coined as the intervention context – in other words a description of the studied project as a case of Finnish-Nepali bilateral development cooperation.

2. “In gathering and configuring the data into a story, the researcher needs to attend to the embodied nature of the protagonist.” This idea is founded on Lazarus’ notion of people’s emotional responses to events and actions being not only cognitive but also bodily. In other words, the bodily dimensions and genetic-given propensities of people affect their goals and produce life concerns. According to Polkinghorne, it is therefore important that the researcher includes the bodily dimension of the participants of research in the storied explanation of the research topic.293 I have taken this guideline into consideration in the framework of this study as part of a broader concern regarding the effects of “age, race and gender” in research294. Concretely, the “embodied nature” of the participants and thus protagonists of the case study have been recorded in connection to each interview transcript, and disclose in minimum the (approximate) age, ethnicity and gender of each research participant in question. One reason for doing this was related to ensuring during the data collection process that I would end up with a balance of perspectives from as many different kinds of groups of people as possible. This proved to be useful particularly during my visit to the project on the local level in Bhatakatiya, Achham, where I encountered suspicions from some individuals toward my research. The suspicions were voiced to my local guide Kalawati. When Kalawati had told the locals that I was talking to all kinds of people, all castes, both genders, old and young alike, it watered suspicions down.295 In order for the reader to be able to gain an overview of the embodied nature of the participants of this study, I have gathered and presented information about them in the chapter presenting my research data. Finally, whenever feasible and not at risk of impeding promises of anonymity, I have included information about the participants speaking in the narrative in connection to the quotes used in this research report.

293 Polkinghorne 17.
295 This is linked also to the principle of simultaneity and the idea of research as intervention, as will be discussed below in the section on appreciative inquiry.
3. “In developing the story’s setting, the researcher needs to be mindful...of the importance of significant other people in affecting the actions and goals of the protagonist.” Here, Polkinghorne calls for an explanation of the relationships between the main characters and other people in the development of the plot. He explains this request through Carr’s notion of the “we-subject,” according to which the reasons for undertaking actions are often related to concerns for other peoples’ happiness, and not simply to fulfill a personal (or project related) agenda.296 In order to identify the relevant actors of the studied development cooperation project as well as their relationships to the intervention and to each other, I have mainly consulted the organizational chart of the project, which is presented as annex 1 to this research report. I do recognize the importance of other significant people or actors (outside of the project) affecting the project’s work. Yet I must make a note here on one of the limitations of this study, in that given the constraints of time and finances, it was not possible to collect additional data on the “others’” perspectives nor get very deep into the analysis of the “we-subjects.”

4. Because configuring a narrative is about the central actors and their choices and movement toward a specific outcome, Polkinghorne maintains that the researcher needs to concentrate on the choices and actions of these central persons. He claims that to understand a person, we must grasp their meanings and understandings; their vision of the world as well as their motivations, interests, plans and purposes. Polkinghorne suggests paying attention to the inner struggles, values and emotional states of the interviewees as important data; and further, due to the fact that different people respond differently to the same events, he calls for a description of the interaction between the central protagonists and the broader setting.297 With the design I have created for inquiry, it is not possible to name any one group (let alone specific persons) as the central actor(s) of this study. On the one hand it would (emotionally) be easy and nice to say that the local people whose lives and development this project is about are the most central. On the other, individuals on the local level have traditionally had very little to do with or say about Finnish development policy or cooperation guidelines. In this sense it would be just as rational and handy to claim that the actors within the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the development experts and practitioners of the implementing agency, for instance would be the most central. They are the ones, after all, who seem to have had the most power in making choices about the

296 Polkinghorne 17.
297 Polkinghorne 17.
design, and key principles of how to carry out aid in a situation of contextual fragility. However, in aiming to avoid what the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has coined as “the danger of the single story,”298 and in line with the guidance for this study provided by the poetic principle and inclusivity (to be explained below), instead of nominating any one group from within the framework of the project as the most central, I have opted for a “more-is-more” approach. In other words, I have set myself up with the tall order of looking to the whole range of primary project stakeholders as “central.” I have done so in order to ensure that voices, ideas and perspectives from all levels and diverse positions of the studied project may be heard. I have done so also, to avoid arriving at stereotypes, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie suggests299. By referring to the “whole range of primary stakeholders” as “central,” the actors whose perspectives and interests are left out of this study are those situated in the broader spheres of district and national administration and policy in Nepal (as well as international development policy), not to mention the broad range of other development actors working in the same thematic sectors and/or regional areas as the studied project. All of which have also naturally had an interest and an effect on the way in which the studied project has been carried out.

Due to the resulting large number of “central actors” the extent to which I have been able to pay attention to the inner struggles, values and emotional states of the interviewees, as Polkinghorne suggests, has obviously been limited. I have, however, taken this guideline into consideration in the way in which I listened to and read the interview data. In my discussions with research participants I attempted to be attentive to not only the “whats” and “hows,” but also to the “whys,” “why-nots” and that which was left unsaid. Further, when there were points in the interview data where research participants expressed emotions, I aimed at being particularly sensitive in hearing what might have been behind those feelings. And whenever feasible and becoming, I have included my observations (and interpretations) of emotions as part of the narrative.

5. “In constructing the story, the researcher needs to consider the historical continuity of the characters.” People are historical beings and retain as part of


299 Ibid. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie claims that “[t]he single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make the one story become the only story.”
themselves their previous experiences, which in turn are manifested in the present as habits and patterns of thought. In considering the protagonists of a case study as historical beings then, says Polkinghorne, the researcher needs to be attentive to the social events that the participants have experienced. The claim is that in order to make the protagonists’ actions and decisions understandable and sensible to the reader, the researcher should present them as consistent with previous experience. Polkinghorne admits, however, that although a person’s past experiences tend to persevere into the present, they do not necessarily determine future action. In fact, a case history may just as well be about a certain individual’s struggle to change former modes of action and to do things differently. In the framework of this study, I understand this fifth point of Polkinghorne’s guidelines as being close to the previous one in that it places emphasis on the individuality of actors. As such, I have likewise taken it into consideration in the design and formulation of interview questions: A usual way for me to start discussions with my research participants was to ask about their personal background in development (particularly in the case of participants representing ministerial and project support unit staff as well as district level actors). In my discussions with research participants on the local level in Bhatakatiya, in turn, I usually aimed at finding out about their prior experience with development projects and the conflict in Nepal. Finally, in reporting the research as a retrospective narrative, I have attempted to include some contextualization to my participants’ experience of the conflict and development projects around the immediate quotes used in the narrative. As the reader will find, however, for reasons related to narrative smoothing described above, this has not been consistent throughout the narrative.

6. The outcome of a narrative analysis is a story. As such the research report requires a bounded temporal period; in other words a beginning, middle and end. According to Polkinghorne this means “the researcher must mark the beginning point of the story and the point of denouement.” Further, the story needs to focus on a specific context in which the plot takes place, and the characters involved should be presented with enough detail so that they appear as unique individuals in a particular situation. Details differentiating this story from other similar ones should therefore not be overlooked. Polkinghorne claims that the power of a storied outcome is derived specifically from its presentation of distinctive actors in unique situations, dealing with issues in a personal manner. He claims that this power is contrasted with research findings that present the abstracted and
For my research, this guideline has meant identifying and clearly stating the time period and context in question for the case study, much in line with what is discussed above about this research being a case study. The unit of analysis studied was thus defined as the first phase of the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project in Western and Far Western Nepal, representing a case of Finnish bilateral development cooperation carried out in a conflict-affected context. The starting point of the story dates back to the first documents of the design phase in late 2001, stretching out through the years of implementation in 2006-2010, and ending with interviews five years after the ending of the project in 2015. The protagonists of the narrative that this dissertation results in are individuals representing the primary stakeholders of the chosen case study project. Polkinghorne’s guidance to the researcher to present the central actors with “enough detail so that they appear as unique individuals in a particular situation” has been tricky to fulfill for two reasons. First, as opposed to how Polkinghorne presents the protagonists of narratives as clearly identifiable individual persons, I have defined the central actors of this study in a somewhat more fuzzy way as referring to representatives of the various stakeholder groups of the studied project. As such, I have introduced these actors merely as groups as opposed to individuals. The second complication in presenting the actors in detail relates to the commitment to retain the anonymity of the persons who have been willing to act as participants in this study.

7. The final, and seemingly most important guideline for judging the adequacy of narrative analysis, as presented by Polkinghorne, is whether it makes the generation of a story of the researched phenomenon plausible and understandable. Whereas the previous six guidelines refer to dimensions that needed to be considered in the process of generating a story from data – in addition to providing valuable perspectives in terms of what and how to gather the dataset – this final guideline concerns the need for the researcher to provide a story line that serves to compose a meaningful explanation of the participants’ responses and action vis-à-vis the researched phenomenon from the disparate data elements. Although the composition process of a narrative analysis “cannot be accomplished by following an algorithmic recipe, certain steps are commonly used in the production of the storied narratives,” claims Polkinghorne. Ultimately, as mentioned earlier already, the result of the narrative analysis of this study is in the form of a story, which is a reconstruction of a series of events and actions that produced a particular outcome.

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300 Polkinghorne 17.
Following Polkinghorne’s advice then, the configuration process of the story begins with the story’s ending or denouement. “By specifying the outcome, the researcher locates a viewing point from which to select data events necessary for producing the conclusion.” The central question to be asked in constructing the story then is: “How is it that this outcome came about and what events and actions contributed to this solution?” The main research question that I started out with in generating this retrospective historical narrative is “How is it that the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project came to take into consideration the conflict history and fragility of its operational context, and what events and actions contributed to this?” The general denouement that I specified at the beginning of the analysis process was something along the following lines: due to the civil war in Nepal the contextual tensions were prominently present in the design phase and had a significant effect on the design and implementation of the project. From this envisioned conclusion, or story line of the narrative then, I retrospectively viewed the data elements in order to link them into a series of happenings that led to the outcome.

After identifying the denouement I was able to work directly with the elements in the data. A first step here was to arrange the project documentation and archival data chronologically. I did this by using a graphic/visual model known from conflict resolution work coined as “timelining.” Essentially this was based on a set of matrixes into which I had compiled the project’s documentation and key events in the context along a timeline. The next step for me was to identify which elements in the dataset could act as contributors to the outcome. I did this in part together with the participants of the study in the process of interviews e.g. by integrating follow-up questions to points when I felt the interviewees were on to my plot, or when I felt that there was a gap or meaningful silence in the project documentation part of the dataset. But for the most part I made the decisions on which elements to use in support of the outcome through an intuitive process in the flow of writing the narrative. I also wanted to remain open to the possibility of surprises in the data, and therefore I spent a significant amount of time in meticulously reading through the data over and over again, looking for hints and signs of contextual tensions and signs of the conflict/context being taken into consideration. Included in this was also remaining attentive to elements in the data that would disclose (f)actors that enabled or prevented taking the conflict-affected

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301 Polkinghorne 18.
context into consideration in designing and implementing the project. Following this, I looked for connections of cause and influence among the events, and began to identify action elements by providing because of and in order to reasons for which they were undertaken.\textsuperscript{303} As Polkinghorne suggests, however, the connections sought for in this process were often not that straightforward, but tended rather to be combinations of events that influenced a response and provided sufficient reason for action. The final step is the writing of the story. The final storied product of this dissertation aims to constitute a “temporal gestalt in which the meaning of [the various] part[s] is given through reciprocal relationships with the plotted whole and other parts.” Quoting Vanhoozer, Polkinghorne notes: “Just as painting is a \textit{visual} representation which shapes… space, so narrative is a \textit{verbal} representation of reality which shapes… time.” The challenge, in Heidegger’s terms, has been how to construct – through recollection and imagination – a display of the complex, interwoven nature of human experience as it unfolds though time and as it stands out at any present moment. Polkinghorne claims that it is the plot that provides the systemic unity needed for the story, coining it as “the glue that connects the parts together.” Therefore, crucial in terms of the final writing out of the analysis has been the construction of a plot outline, which served me as a temporally patterned whole or intellectual construction, developed from the sequentially ordered data in the timeline.\textsuperscript{304}

In striving for coherence and plausibility of the narrative analysis, with an outline of the plot constructed and in mind, my task as a researcher has been to fill in and link the data elements to one another as well as to the plotted whole story. In describing the interdependence of the story and data, Polkinghorne notes that the filling in of the outline with detail often has the effect of displaying weaknesses in the plot’s capacity to unite the data. This then requires adjustments to the outline so that it better fits the data. Similarly, the process of linking various data elements to one another and defining their contribution to the plotted outline sometimes reveals gaps in the dataset. This in turn is an indication of the need to gather additional data in order to fill in the missing links and to be able to produce a full and explanatory story.\textsuperscript{305} All of the above describes fairly accurately my experience of constructing the narrative of this study. As explained earlier, and will be brought up again in the discussion chapter, I started out with a more simplistic

\textsuperscript{303} Polkinghorne referring to Schutz and Luckmann 5-23.
\textsuperscript{304} Polkinghorne 18.
\textsuperscript{305} Ibid. 5-23.
version of the plot than the one I ended up with. This was in part due to the fact that when I started with the analysis, I did not have view into all of what the data would reveal to me. Furthermore, it was possibly also a question of the weakness of the initial intended plot, focused primarily on the presence of civil war, to unite the data. These aspects then led to adjusting the plot to better fit with what I found in the data, and producing the more nuanced picture. I also identified some gaps in the data, for example there were certain time periods in the timeline of the case study for which no project documentation was available. It is in these types of situations that I resorted to conducting supplementary interviews with my research participants.

A further complication in constructing the final story as a pure retrospective narrative, loyal to the principle of chronology came about from the two primary types of data (archival material and project documentation, and interview data) constituting the dataset of this study. I first wrote a skeleton of the narrative (or base narrative) based on the archival material and project documentation alone. This was the easy part, as the self-evident chronology of this body of the dataset was helpful in organizing the pieces together. The second phase of the writing process consisted of weaving in perspectives from the interview data into the chronological narrative. This was significantly more difficult. In my attempt to fill the narrative in with details from the interview data, I ran into a problem of chronology versus thematic findings. I found that people seldom placed their perspectives in the interviews into a specific or easily identifiable point in time. Where then to place interesting and relevant points from the interview data, often describing the project as whole or from the perspective of a particular thematic angle, as opposed to a certain moment in the timeline? What about themes and topics emerging in the transcripts of interviews that had never been mentioned in the project documentation? At times I found it extremely challenging to decide exactly where in the narrative I should place the perspectives of the various research participants. The dominance of the documentation as the core of the story possibly also lead to not using the interview data as thoroughly as would have been the case had I conducted a thematic analysis of the dataset.

Following Polkinghorne and Chase, it is in place for me to explicitly recognize in this final reporting of my research that the findings of my work are the outcome of a series of constructions and that this research is in itself constructive. The data used for this narrative inquiry are in part dialogical productions resulting from my
interaction with the participants of this study\textsuperscript{306}, and thus the final write-up should by no means be taken as a neutral representation of the findings.\textsuperscript{307} Rather, this narrative analysis should be considered flexible, variable, and ultimately also as shaped in interaction with its audience. In other words the meanings and understandings of this research report will in the end be formed in interaction not only with the participants of this study, but with the readers of this dissertation.

\section*{3.3 Apprecciative inquiry}

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, narrativity combined with the notion of appreciative inquiry forms the core of the methodology of this dissertation. I will explain in the following how adopting appreciative inquiry as an additional building block for my research design and methodological setup has served to further define and refine my take on the various aspects of narrativity in research, as discussed above. \textit{Most centrally, appreciative inquiry has informed this study in terms of data collection and interviewing. It has also provided guidance in my research process on how to explore ideas and information as well as to find new perspectives on what this information is about.} Appreciative inquiry has shown me how engagement and participation by people who have traditionally been thought of as the subjects of research, can in fact contribute to the development of knowledge, and how traditional structures of power and influence can thereby move toward more open and democratic research practice. I have found particularly inspiring the central idea inherent in appreciative inquiry that no particular history or story is considered more significant than another.\textsuperscript{308} This resonates well with the implicit feminist undercurrent\textsuperscript{309} of my

\textsuperscript{306} Here I refer in particular to the interviews conducted for this research. The archival material and project documentation, on the other hand, are narrative data produced originally for other purposes, and as such are not dialogical productions resulting from my interaction with the project.

\textsuperscript{307} Riessman speaks on the issue of representation and claims, “all forms of representation of experience are limited portraits.” For her, meaning is in itself ambiguous because it arises out of a process of interaction between people: the self, teller, listener, recorder, analyst, reader… Riessman defines five levels of representation as 1) attending to experience; 2) telling about experience; 3) transcribing the experience; 4) analyzing the experience; and 5) reading the experience. See Catherine Kohler Riessman, \textit{Narrative Analysis} (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1993).


\textsuperscript{309} Although I have not made it an explicit point to identify myself as “A Feminist Researcher,” my research approach is profoundly informed by feminist research ethics, particularly with regard to co-producing data through interviews with my research participants. See e.g. Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui
research approach. Jan Reed\textsuperscript{310} explains this as posing an opportunity to move away from research led by specific individuals alone who take sole responsibility and credit for it, toward an idea of collaborative research, in which direction, credit and responsibilities are increasingly shared between the researcher and the participants. I have found this of specific value for doing research in conflict-affected rural Nepal, due to the empowering potential that I perceive this type of study as having.

So what is appreciative inquiry? In what follows, I will approach this question by first briefly describing the background of the notion of appreciative inquiry, and then sketching out some of its applications. This will be followed by a discussion of appreciative inquiry in research, and a presentation of the core principles and key issues that drive the approach. In connection with the overview of the guiding principles of appreciative inquiry, I discuss the ways in which the approach has shaped this study, thus shedding light on respective parts of my research process.

### 3.3.1 Background and applications

The birthplace and co-founding of appreciative inquiry happened in the context of a doctoral program in Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio in the collaboration between David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{311} Appreciative inquiry (AI) was originally developed as part of Cooperrider's PhD studies as a conceptual reconfiguration of action research. Cooperrider and Srivastva claimed that going beyond questions of epistemology, appreciative inquiry has as its basis a metaphysical concern: it posits that social existence as such is a miracle that can never be fully comprehended. Proceeding from this level of understanding, they began to explore the uniqueness of an appreciative mode of inquiry. More than a method or technique, it constituted for them “a way of living with, being with, and directly participating in the varieties of social organization we are compelled to study.” They went on to state:

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\textsuperscript{311} "AI History and Timeline," Appreciative Inquiry Commons, \url{http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/timeline.cfm} (accessed 03/11, 2015).
serious consideration and reflection on the ultimate mystery of being engenders a reverence for life that draws the researcher to inquire beyond superficial appearances to deeper levels of the life-generating essentials and potentials of social existence.\textsuperscript{312}

The approach taken by Cooperrider and his colleagues was, at the time, very different from established methodologies of organizational research. Drawing on research from fields such as organizational behavior, psychology, medicine, education and sociology, they challenged the traditional theories of change and created a new set of ideas.\textsuperscript{313} Kenneth Gergen's seminal work \textit{Toward Transformation of Social Knowledge} from 1982 is said to have provided a theoretical foundation for taking Cooperrider's work forward. It critiqued existing research traditions, pointing to a new direction in social theory development that built on the interaction between research and practice. This orientation also paid attention to the processes of developing ideas as people got together to "co-construct" interpretations that could have a powerful impact on the way they acted.\textsuperscript{314}

With this background, appreciative inquiry has experienced a process of growth and development from the 1980s to the present through use and further shaping, primarily in the field of organizational development (OD) study and practice. Whitney, Liebler and Cooperrider\textsuperscript{315} provide their definition of appreciative inquiry through an inspection of the meaning of the two words involved, as follows:

\textit{Appreciate, v.,}

Valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems.

To increase in value, e.g., the economy has appreciated in value.


\textsuperscript{314} Reed, \textit{Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change} 24; See also Bushe, \textit{Appreciative Inquiry: Theory and Critique} 94.

Synonyms: valuing, prizing, esteeming, honoring.

_Inquire, v._

The act of exploration and discovery.

To ask questions, to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities.

Synonyms: discovery, search, systematic exploration and study.

Whitney et al.\(^\text{316}\) describe appreciative inquiry further as being both a philosophy of positive change and a methodology for high-participation, a form of collaborative transformation at the heart of which is an understanding that human systems move in the directions that they focus their attention on. It thus constitutes a call to shift the focus of attention from what they call deficit discourse (vocabularies produced by critical and problem-oriented approaches to scientific research) to positive discourse. As such, appreciative inquiry is a deviation from investigation of problems to a curiosity about living potential, key success factors, images of an ideal future, and hope. Another way to portray appreciative inquiry has been to look at it as something that constitutes a process with a specific aim and approach. Reed has described appreciative inquiry as being focused “on supporting people getting together to tell stories of positive development in their work that they can build on.”\(^\text{317}\)

Although the bulk of experience with appreciative inquiry has been in the OD practice of building organizational, management and leadership capacity in businesses, there is also documented use of the approach in the public and nonprofit sectors as well as in the broader field of development.\(^\text{318}\) A somewhat newer trend seems to be the use of AI in the field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding practice.\(^\text{319}\) While the evolution of appreciative inquiry as a research methodology has progressed least of all in comparison to what has been seen in the practical fields,\(^\text{320}\) the academic field of peace and conflict research appears to be but a fledgling in terms of AI applications. However, Mary Hope Schwoebel and

\(^{316}\) Ibid.

\(^{317}\) Reed 42.

\(^{318}\) Ibid.; Liebler and Sampson, _Appreciative Inquiry in Peacebuilding: Imagining the Possible_ 62; Reed, _Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change_ 25

\(^{319}\) Whitney et al. 26; Liebler et al. 61-62.

\(^{320}\) Reed 45.
Erin McCandless\textsuperscript{321} present a strong case for converging appreciative inquiry with peacebuilding and development and forging it into a useful methodology for the academic and practical pursuits of both. They base their point, amongst other things, on their observation of the fields of appreciative inquiry, peacebuilding and development as sharing an assumption of the possibility of win-win solutions.\textsuperscript{322} It is as part of this forging process – bringing these fields of AI, peace and development research, and practice together – that I see my own exploration and use of appreciative inquiry in this study.

### 3.3.2 Appreciative inquiry in research

Mapping appreciative inquiry against other research frameworks offers a way of thinking through the implications of using it as an approach to research as well as the implications it has for organizing and carrying out AI-guided studies. It can also provide a way of thinking about what it is that research informed by appreciative inquiry can offer in the development of knowledge and understanding. Using AI as (or as informing) research method, on the other hand, may imply a shift in the emphasis of thinking toward the \textit{processes} of inquiry, i.e. the way in which information is gathered and interpreted. Based on her experience of mapping appreciative inquiry within the broader field of research, Jan Reed portrays appreciative inquiry in the Wittgensteinian sense as showing “family resemblance” to various different research models: It can be linked to and shows different characteristics that can be related to a number of ideas and traditions across a range of methodologies, but does not match up to any one exactly or exclusively.\textsuperscript{323} She points to social constructivist research and critical theory as two fundamental worldviews with significance for appreciative inquiry. Social constructivism shares with AI the interest in meaning and interpretation rather than measurable facts; and the concern of ensuring that the meanings the world has for participants

\textsuperscript{322} Mutual emphasis on process and outcome ownership by participants; the tradition of using existing local resources and indigenous capacities; and foundation on the assumptions about the desirability and possibility of fulfilling people’s potential for human development are mentioned by Schwoebel and McCandless as other links between AI, peacebuilding and development. See Schwoebel et al., 195.
\textsuperscript{323} Reed 45-46, 53.
involved in the research are understood. Critical theory, in turn, links to appreciative inquiry with its interest in developing challenges to (established) ways of thinking, and shares a concern for searching for data that is able to question assumptions. While Gervase R. Bushe\(^{324}\) stresses the influence that theories of discourse and narrative have had on appreciative inquiry, Reed points to ethnography, case studies, narrative methodology, and action research as linking to and informing appreciative inquiry.\(^{325}\) I will return to the links, as explained by Reed, between appreciative inquiry and narrativity in the section below on the poetic principle.

3.3.3 Guiding principles – perspectives on my research process

As the debate and experiences of application widened across the community of appreciative inquiry practitioners since the late 1980s, a number of ideas about the approach were refined. These ideas have become the crux to understanding, communicating, and applying appreciative inquiry. The most influential statement, claims Gervase R. Bushe\(^{326}\), has been Cooperrider and Whitney’s five key principles, the concepts and values on which the approach is based.\(^{327}\) In the discussion that follows, I will explain what I have carried along with me of the principles in the planning and conducting of this study, and also shed light on various parts of the research process along the way. The examination of the principles in this way also provides a space for me to further clarify my epistemic

\(^{324}\) Bushe, *Appreciative Inquiry: Theory and Critique*.

\(^{325}\) Reed, *Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change* 54-56.

\(^{326}\) Bushe 92-93.

\(^{327}\) In addition to the key principles, the community of AI practitioners and thinkers has defined a set of assumptions for the approach. Essentially the principles were translated into assumption statements with which appreciative inquiries could more easily get started. The assumption statements read as follows: 1) In every society, organization, or group there is something that works / all human systems have something to value about their past or present; 2) What we focus on becomes our reality / image and action are linked; 3) Reality is created in the moment and multiple realities exist simultaneously; 4) The act of asking questions influences the subject, group or society involved / groups move in the direction of the questions they ask; 5) People are more confident and comfortable in their journey toward the unknown future if they carry forward parts from their past as they know it; 6) What is carried forward to the future should represent what is best from the past; 7) Valuing differences is important; 8) The language we use creates our realities. (See Reed 27-29; and Liebler and Sampson 56-58). In addition to the principles and assumptions, the AI community has defined certain processes of the approach, which are extrapolated from the principles and the assumptions, and define the ways in which they are put into practice. (See Reed 26).
stance to the reader and to explain in more detail the methodological choices of this study.

The constructivist principle

The constructivist principle states that we collectively make meaning of our world. In other words, our thoughts about the world and what we believe to be real in it are created in our conversations with one another, through mutual interpretation and construction. These exchanges between people lead to agreement about how we collectively perceive the world, how we should act in it and what we mutually accept as true. When and where in the world we live, what our habits, occupations, traditions and teachings are, and how we view our very identity all contribute to how we interpret the world. This means that there are just as many different stories of what is happening and how it is taking place that exist alongside each other as there are different people interpreting the world. In terms of research strategies based on AI, what is of central interest in the constructivist principle, are the processes of construction; the way that people can come to tell different stories about the past, present and future and the way that these stories have the power to shape and reflect the way people think and act. This links to and overlaps with what I have discussed earlier about narrativity as an ontological and epistemological presumption. As presented above, my view on narrativity in this study works in two directions: accounts of the world are both the starting point for my research as well as its end result. The dataset studied for this research was co-produced with people who organized their experience and knowledge into narratives through their own meaning systems and in interaction with the organic, social and political context of the case study project. The reality that the data communicates and constructs is subjective; and further, in terms of the narratives within the interview transcripts, I have taken part in the construction thereof in the role of the researcher. I have thus been a co-constructer of those stories, which in turn has

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328 I refer to methodology in the sense defined by Ilkka Niiniluoto as exploration of the underlying assumptions and starting points of the chosen research methods and techniques. Ilkka Niiniluoto, Johdatus tieteenfilosofiaan, käsitteen- ja teorianmuodostus (Keuruu: Otavan Kirjapaino Oy, 2002).

329 Reed, Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change 26; Liebler and Sampson, Appreciative Inquiry in Peacebuilding: Imagining the Possible 58-59.
included reflecting on how I enabled, affected, or even possibly limited the scope of opportunities to tell those stories.  

The principle of simultaneity – or research as intervention

The principle of simultaneity contains the idea that the seeds of change are embedded in the questions we ask. It recognizes that change and inquiry are simultaneous processes. Therefore according to this principle, inquiry itself is defined as an intervention in the way it stimulates reflection and thought, which in turn lead to different ways of thinking and carrying out activities. This has been an important underlying principle and essential driver in leading the way to conduct research on the chosen topic of this dissertation in the first place. As explained above in the section on narrativity as a question of reflexivity, I have from the outset of this research project thought of it as being in some sense an intervention in itself. To continue with my metaphor of research as stepping into a puddle of water, it has never been my intention to do so without creating any ripples or splashes, or leaving a trace or footprint of some kind. Quite the contrary: I have wanted to make a difference all along. This is linked to the question about researcher positionality, and my identity as a member of the Finnish scene of various (policy, advocacy/practitioner and research) actors within the broader field of conflict resolution, development and peacebuilding. As a member of that community, in my roles mainly within the Finnish peace and development NGO sector, I found myself wondering about the inconsistencies and gaps that I had perceived as existing between policy idea(l)s and what was being done on the level of praxis. These ponderings led to formulating the interest of knowledge, which lies at the roots of this study. I had come to understand through my prior professional experience of various processes of organizational development that decisions (just as policies) alone usually do not constitute change. That something further is needed. Thus, I decided to take part in the debate through research, to unveil, if you will, what and how things happen on the practical side of development aid in a conflict-affected context. Acknowledging that the positioning

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331 Liebler and Sampson 60; Reed 26.
of the researcher inherently biases research of this kind, has freed me to accept the idea that inquiry is simultaneously the production of self-and-world. What I have chosen to study and the decisions I have made about my research strategy and design then, creates as much as it discovers the world. There is more to be said on the topic of researcher positionality in the framework of this study, a task to which I will return with a separate section below.

The principle of simultaneity came to life for me in the research process especially during the interviews and discussions I had with my research participants. Most of the interviews I conducted were open-ended discussions, either semi- or unstructured discussions, allowing for a free flow of thought and development of narratives about the case study project, life in Bhatakatiya VDC, Achham, and the peace and/or development process in Nepal more broadly. In this sense, instead of specific and focused questions on my research topic, the “seeds” that I initially sowed into the discussions were usually framed as fairly general themes, sending people off to talk as freely and broadly as possible around the topic. Quite often the research participants would initiate talking about peace, development and the past conflict, all topics that I was interested in. When this happened, I would probe them to elaborate or give more examples. However, if my themes of interest in the link between peace and development or conflict sensitive aid had not emerged during the conversation, I would pose a more focused question on them, usually toward the end of the interview session. As the reader will find in the narrative chapters to follow, at times this led to moments of embarrassed silence, and at others to happy eureka moments for the interviewees. In either case, I do suspect to have stimulated reflection and thought on my topic among my research participants. This in turn may or may not have led to new ways of thinking and possibly even carrying out activities. This was my hope in any case; that I would be able to give something to the participants in return for their time and attention toward my study. In fact, in cases where the interviewees would give me a blank and puzzled look in response to a question e.g. about the Do No Harm principles mentioned in the project’s reports, I would end up explaining to the research participant my understanding of Do No Harm and how I understood it as being related to peace and conflict sensitivity in development.

On the other hand I found evidence of the contrary too: during my visit to the project in 2008, the team leader at the project support unit asked me to share my perspectives from Bhatakatiya and to facilitate a session on peace, conflict and development during a project coordination meeting for the entire field staff. After the completion of the project I was keen on finding out whether this had left any
traces in the project. I did not have the opportunity to follow-up on this extensively, but did inquire about any possible “ripples” of my visit to the project from some of the people I had spoken with in 2008 and again during supplementary interviews in 2013-2015. Somewhat to my surprise – and in all honesty, also as a slight disappointment – I failed to find very many clear traces of my footprints in the data.

Finally, the mere fact that I, as a literate female person from Finland, travelled to Far Western Nepal and trekked up to Bhatakatiya, Achham “alone” (i.e. without my husband), lived with and talked to the local women, children and men gave me ample food for thought regarding the principle of simultaneity. In Bhatakatiya, where most people were illiterate, uneducated and had very little or no prior experience of development projects, the focus of discussions was on themes other than “conflict sensitivity” or “implementation modalities of development aid.” In this sense I didn’t feel that I had very much at all to give back to the locals in return for their participation in my study. Instead, I felt slightly worried that I might be perceived as an intruder in the community with my notebook, recorder, and all my questions; that I might be bothering or taking up too much of the locals’ time from their everyday work and chores. I knew for sure that I was the one learning the most; I was the one taking, but not giving.

After we had showed up late for our meeting with the community in Parivan, I told Kalawati that I needed to know if there are any feelings of disappointment or negative vibes toward us, my research or the process…But she responded: “it’s okay since you were [here] just for the first time… I think that if you went and asked the same questions repeatedly, they would get annoyed”

Kalawati shared with me that one woman had asked her “why are you going to Patakani every day with Anisa?” She had explained to the woman that we are talking with different people every time: men, women, and children. Kalawati then told me that if I would stay here longer [and people would get used to having me around] the locals wouldn’t mind and pay so much attention. “They want to know when they will have the opportunity to meet another white person again☺”, she said.

332 Kalawati was the social mobilizer in the studied project, acting as a local guide for me in Bhatakatiya.
333 Patakani (formerly/also known as Dalit Tole) was an area in Bhatakatiya, inhabited mostly by Dalits, where the project was started.
334 Research journal 18.3.2008
In addition to appearing to be taken as the white faced stranger that the Bhatakatiyans came to see out of curiosity, or whom “the Kapatini [witch] would come and make ill and eat up”\(^{335}\), the fact that I was there, doing my research in their community did seem to stimulate reflection and thought – of the kind I had not expected at all. Quite often while spending time at the Dada (village square) talking to people and writing notes in my notebook, children would come and watch me write. My interpreter Bimala, a school teacher by profession, explained to me that most children there probably had not seen someone writing so much like that before, and that it gave them something to wonder about.

Another example from Bhatakatiya was after a lengthy discussion I had had with a large group of women in Naitola village. After we had finished the interview and had said our goodbyes, one of the women stood up, and said that she wanted to give her personal introduction to me. Following her example all of the women did the same. Finally one of the women said:

> We now learned to say Namaskaar and to do our introductions, otherwise we didn’t know how – and now our faces are swollen from pride… We have some – we have become empowered!\(^{336}\)

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### The poetic principle and the question of inclusivity

In the same way that poems are open to countless interpretations, the stories of people’s past, present, and future constitute an endless source of learning, inspiration, interpretation – and possibility. Stories carry with them meaning and truths that elude even the most sophisticated documentation systems. The poetic principle values storytelling as a way of gathering holistic information that includes emotions in addition to facts, and of reaching beyond verifiable data toward the most meaningful and inspiring moments in the lives of individuals, groups, and communities. This principle acknowledges that people and their worlds are like open books being continually authored by people themselves as well as co-authored together with other people that interact with them. What we choose as a relevant “plotline” at any given moment of storytelling about our lives and

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\(^{335}\) Research journal 14.3.2008

experience depends on what we find to be of most interest or relevance at the time.337

The poetic principle of appreciative inquiry resonates with my understanding of narrativity as a way of exploring the researched phenomenon as experienced, felt and explained by my research participants. From this perspective then, my task as the researcher has been to support my research participants through this individual and collective process of authoring, engaging their attention and energy in a way that made it accessible to them. In practice this happened through the many different kinds of communications I had with the participants. By setting up meetings and interviews or leaping to the opportunity spontaneously to talk to representatives of the various stakeholders of the case study project, I provided a space for my research participants to tell their story, and for myself an opportunity to listen and learn. With the open-ended, flexible and often creative manner that I approached these situations, this usually worked well by simply sending the interviewees off to talk freely about their life (in the case of locals in Bhatakatiya) and their personal story in relation to the project. My job, or the support to the authoring/storying, was thus on the one hand to allow for the development of rich, personable stories and diversions off-topic as well as a logic and chronology chosen by the participant. On the other hand I also took it upon myself to coax the participants to share their perspectives on certain themes.338

I have taken the poetic principle as being closely linked to the aim of inclusivity, a value important not only for me personally, but also forming a central tenet in human rights based thinking as well as in the case study project in itself. Inclusivity is also mentioned as being one of the key issues for research guided by appreciative inquiry339. In this study inclusivity has meant involving as many people as possible in the research process in a collaborative and communal way. I have aimed at this broad and diverse inclusion in order to ensure that different voices, ideas and perspectives may be heard from diverse positions. My hope has been that this would lead to a richer picture of the phenomenon being studied. Choosing this path aiming for inclusion has compelled me to ponder over questions of

337 Liebler and Sampson 59-60; Reed 26; Bushe 95.
338 See e.g. Salmon and Kohler Riessman on co-construction. This links also to what may be understood as a narrative research relationship. See e.g. Paul Gready, "The Public Life of Narratives: Ethics, Politics, Methods," in Doing Narrative Research, eds. Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire and Maria Tambourkou (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008) 146-147. I will elaborate my discussion of conducting interviews for this study in the section on data collection.
339 Reed, Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change 70-74.
ownership and responsibility. Although conducting a doctoral research project has proven in many ways to be solitary process, I do want share moral ownership and possible credit for success of this study with my participants. After all, it would have been impossible to carry out this research with its chosen design without the input from them. On the other hand, I take full responsibility for the outcomes as well as possible failures or unintended mishaps that this research may have included.

The principle of anticipation

The anticipatory principle of appreciative inquiry assumes that the way we think about the future will shape the way we move to the future. It recognizes that our behavior is based not only on what we were born with and into or have learned from our surroundings, but also on what we anticipate: what we believe will happen in the future. If we see the future as being full of possibilities, for instance, we tend to move toward those possibilities. On the other hand, if we feel that the future does not hold anything valuable in store for us, we are easily drawn to feel that there is no point in moving on, as it would just seem like a waste of energy.340

I applied the principle of anticipation in this study primarily in the discussions I had with my research participants who represented the beneficiaries of the studied project. The flexible structure of the interviews in Bhatakatiya went along the following lines: I would usually ask people to tell me about their lives in the community in the past and at present. If the project did not come up in their narration at all (which it quite often did as a natural flow of telling about their present lives), I would pose a specific question about their experience of the project, which often led to a longer conversation on that topic. I would then ask about their visions, dreams and hopes for the future. Finally, I would inquire whether there was something in their past or current experience and lives that they wanted to bring into the future with them. I would also commonly ask what they envisioned Bhatakatiya and their lives to be like when the children were grown up. This way of conducting the interviews provided a semi-structure with which to invite my research participants into storytelling. It also functioned as some sort of routine in my collaboration with Bimala, my interpreter. By acting in the

340 Liebler and Sampson, Appreciative Inquiry in Peacebuilding: Imagining the Possible 60; Reed, Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change 27.
interactions with my research participants according to this principle my aim was to support them to direct their energies toward exploring ways of further developing their dreams, hopes and positive images of the future.

Focus on the positive

The positive principle of appreciative inquiry carries with it the idea that if image leads to action then positive image leads to positive action. The principle suggests further that people are naturally drawn to ideas and images that energize and provide nourishment. Although this focus on the positive gives appreciative inquiry its distinctive nature, it is also known to pose problems with regard to research. The theoretical concern is that through focusing on the positive, there is a real danger of neglecting the negative stories, which in turn would end up producing a partial account of the phenomenon being studied. The question raised is whether the positive focus does not offer only limited understanding. On the other hand, all research is in some way partial and incomplete. Research always has a focus, an area of interest; and in an affair guided by appreciative inquiry the emphasis just happens to be on exploring achievement. On pragmatic grounds, the positive focus is thought to potentially encourage participants to provide information more willingly in a non-threatening atmosphere. For this study the positive principle has been most important for the way, and which questions I have posed to my research participants. Essentially the aspiration to discover the positive suggested an approach whereby I aimed at inviting conversations and stories about achievements and successes. I found that my choice to seek out the positive as a red thread throughout the research had a more general implication, which linked to my relationship with the participants of this

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341 Focusing on the positive in my research design and methodology could be seen as a representation of what Elina Penttinen has termed joy in the study of international relations. In her book by the same name, she aims to develop new methodology for the study of International Relations based on joy, informed by current thinking about physics and feminist theory. Penttinen draws on the potential of a non-fragmented worldview and suggests that it is the “modern Western view of human beings (or societies) as isolated and separate from the world that prevents IR from finding new solutions to the questions of war and conflict.” See Elina Penttinen, *Joy and International Relations: A New Methodology* (London: Routledge, 2013).

342 Liebler and Sampson, *Appreciative Inquiry in Peacebuilding: Imagining the Possible* 61; Reed, *Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change* 27.

343 Ibid.

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study. Participation in an appreciative research process can be an unexpected experience, especially if people have been more used to being interviewed or discussing development through a problem-solving orientation. This proved to be very much the case in particular with the participants who represented development professionals and experts. My invitation for participants to focus on the positive sometimes created if not outright suspicion and puzzled feelings, but was definitely the cause of some surprised reactions:

Me: …Well, [can you] tell me… about some of the things that made the project most alive? This question… links to what I wrote to you in the e-mail about wanting to find out about “the best vibes and times” in the project…[when it was] most alive, most efficient, its best successes. Essentially, what were the factors that gave life to the project when it was most alive?

PSU employee: Uhum, well – this is – a fairly positive question (laughs out, sounding surprised)

Me: Mm-m (chuckle)

PSU employee: I will return –

Me: (cutting in) I've heard so many good things about this [project]

PSU employee: (refusing to follow my attempt to sway the focus back to the positive) Well, in the beginning we had an insane amount of ‘situations’ going on – quite aggressive challenges even…³⁴⁴

Mostly, after an initial surprise, research participants would eventually follow my lead and start talking about successes with enthusiasm. But sometimes getting to the successes required more than one round of persuasion. This required patience on my part: to let the interviewees take their own course and continue with their problem-oriented storying, to refrain from trying to thrust them into a strict question-answer structure. Just so I could get my story of the positive. Being patient and respectful to the tellers’ flow, chronology and way of telling their stories often paid off. More often than not it culminated in the opportunity to hear stories and gain perspective of the realities of aid in a conflict-affected context that I possibly would not have had the intuition to ask about, as was the case in the

³⁴⁴ Interview PSU [58] 2014.
interview quoted above. The same research participant continued her account as follows:

PSU employee: … You see, because there was this conflict background in the area – this response starts out quite far off (apologetically) – but 345

Me: That’s fine, keep going!

PSU employee: But just as a background (chuckles) … there was like this whole generation of NGO [people] who had all their life – anyway like ten years, say if you graduate at twenty-something and then you’re in your thirties and the conflict has been going on the entire time of your active work life – so there were these fellas who had grown into the mentality that no one can monitor what they are up to – in other words what they aren’t up to… So we had an insane amount of problems, with local NGOs, but also with people whom we had recruited into the project. Because – they assumed that nobody could see in the field what they are really doing there, and whether or not they are present there at all… They really imagined for real that they should be paid, although they [later] admitted themselves that they hadn’t even been out to the villages, and that they hadn’t done anything. Or they might have half-heartedly gone to show their faces there, drunk a cup of tea, taken names into a list and come back. Or that NGOs make offers to function as support organizations and then aren’t able to mobilize a team, because they didn’t think in the first place that the whole team would be mobilized anyway. That they just won the deal, … while knowing all along that all of the proposed team members will never step foot into the field at all. And in those times [in the beginning of the project] the conditions in the field were really bad. Like, no food, living conditions, sanitation poor, no water. Like, miserable conditions overall. So, you know they were uncomfortable there themselves too. 346

I was well aware that Bhatakatiya, the local level of study for this research, was an area that had been heavily affected by the conflict. Therefore I was somewhat apprehensive about using the principle of focusing on the positive in my interactions with the locals, and did so only with extreme caution. In formulating my questions I did my best to remain mindful to the fact that people who have suffered of violence and loss could easily perceive the positive focus as a way of silencing them or from sharing the not-so-rosy sides of their stories. Despite my caution, I did not always fully succeed in my attempts at mindfulness:

345 Interview PSU [58] 2014.
346 Interview PSU [58] 2014.
Today we [Bimala and I] went out to the market to observe the Maoists conducting their election campaigning. The Maobadis\textsuperscript{347} were standing close to sauji’s stall\textsuperscript{348} when one of them approached us and said that he wanted to talk to me/us. This young man in his mid-twenties is a Maobadi from Ward#6 in Bhatakatiya.

[Notes of the encounter:]

[The young man] sits on the ground in front of us, cross-legged. He has a shiny white Reebok cap on and sunglasses with golden colored rims. He wants to share his experience about torture from the government’s side. He tells us that he had been acting as a political leader here seven years ago [in 2001]. Thus he was captured [in 2006] by the police army (section of Gulm/"Bihm Dal") and put in jail in Doti [district]. He had been held in custody for 14 days and tortured: his head was held in the toilet, chili and nettles were shoved into his nostrils, he had been kicked by men with boots on, beaten from 10 o’clock in the evening until 02 in the morning until he fell unconscious. Needles had been stuck in his fingers and water was let to drip on his head from a 500-liter toilet tank. His hands and feet were bound and he was beaten in the face. He was denied of food for three days. After 14 days he was taken to court where a false testimony was given against him, and he ended up in prison. 11 months ago [in 2007] he was freed with the help of a lawyer.

(Feeling disturbed by this story 😞)

He tells us that the Maobadis want improvement in the jurisdiction and ministry bodies. He claims that also innocent people have suffered (he must be referring to his own political background as the reason for having been captured?).\textsuperscript{349}

As this young man had clearly come to the village for election campaigning, I felt encouraged to ask him – trying to hurry my way toward the positive principle – about what kind of a positive future he had in mind through his political activism. Usually in my discussions with research participants I made a specific effort to

\textsuperscript{347} The Maoists were commonly referred to as Maobadis. I use the two terms interchangeably, depending on what was used in the context.

\textsuperscript{348} Sauji’s stall was a little hut – or “the restaurant” where we had our dal bhat (traditional Nepali meal composed of lentil/legume stew and rice) every day.

\textsuperscript{349} Research journal 15.3.2008. The following quotes from the discussion with the “Young Maobadi” man are all from this same journal entry.
avoid using the word “peace” in interviews, but here it just came out. It clearly annoyed him:

Me: What kind of peaceful society are you working for?

Young Maobadi: We don’t want a Murda Shanti [dead peace]! (Scoffing)

Me: Can you elaborate what you mean with dead peace?

This stumbling in the interview situation due to my being so eager to get to the positive, however, ended up producing an indigenous wording of the Galtungian notion of negative and positive peace (dead peace)350:

Young Maobadi: Well, people use the word peace. But all structures and institutions of the state should be in support of the people... When democracy came [to Nepal] in 1990, this type of democracy was in Naranhiti (?) palace and ministry offices... it took taxes, levy, but people didn’t have an opportunity for their own development. This they don’t want.

Me: How could the dead peace be made alive then?

Young Maobadi: Peace can’t be achieved with weapons, state structures and institutions that support people [are fundamental to peace that is ‘alive’]. People should have access to education, health facilities, a justice system... the leadership should be characterized by good character, and there shouldn’t be prejudice on the public sector... this means that the leadership should not be selfish, it should not deposit money in foreign banks (is he making a reference to the King?). Also the government’s [current] plan to strengthen the army is not the right move. What we need is nishwarthi – leadership, unselfish and good leadership.

It is in place to make note of the fact here that I hardly ever had full control of the interview situations with the locals in Bhatakatiya; and thus also not of the way in which my aim to stick with the positive principle was delivered. This was mainly due to the language gap, which made using an interpreter a necessity. The whole setup of trying to engage in (spontaneous and) open-ended or flexibly structured conversations with locals through consecutive translation turned out to be challenging in more ways than just with regard to the positive principle. This is a point to which I will return in more detail below.

3.4 On positionality

The idea of the need to consider researcher positionality in research is related to the recognition that research processes are necessarily determined by the researcher’s relationship toward the studied subject as well as the other people participating in research. Contemplating researcher positionality and accounting for self is also coined as one of the key issues for research guided by appreciative inquiry, just as Polkinghorne calls for it in narrative research. Considering positionality means taking into account the possibility and probability that the various personal characteristics and roles of the researcher and her relationship with her research participants would in some way affect and/or distort the research process, access to information and ultimately the outcome of the research. The subtle negotiation of power between the researcher and her research participants in particular is crucial in terms of the nature, quantity, and quality of the data that one is able to retrieve during the research process.

One aspect of a researcher's position deals with whether she is part of the culture, organization or group being studied (an insider) or whether she has come to the world being studied from the outside, simply and only to carry out the study. It is, however, not always easy or even possible define positionality on an insider-outsider axis, as researchers often occupy shifting and/or ambiguous positions in relation to the worlds and phenomena they study. Whatever the case, the researcher's position is always a reflection of membership, alliance and interest. Therefore, the position(s) adopted or held by the researcher affect every phase of the research process from defining the interest of knowledge and research task – as I have explained above – and constructing the research design, to the analysis and writing of results and finally, the dissemination of the study. It is for these reasons imperative that the researcher reflects on her positions and interests and is able to explain how they are imposed at various stages of the research process.

351 Reed, *Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change* 82-85 Reed claims that positionality is particularly important for research informed by AI due to its dimensions of inclusivity and the focus on building on the positive.

352 Also feminist theoretical reflection on belief systems about what constitutes knowledge, evidence, and convincing arguments (i.e. epistemology) holds that it is possible, and indeed essential, to reflect on the epistemologies that inform our work as researchers. See Ackerly et al. (2010) 25.

353 Such as age, gender, ethnicity, ideology, educational background, institutional, political and professional affiliations etc.

354 Ibid.
follows, I will to continue to make explicit my positionings vis-à-vis this study, and aim at being sufficiently reflexive\textsuperscript{355} without becoming self-centered. By using reflexive identification, I hope to clarify in particular the angles from which this research was approached in order for the reader to be able to comprehend why the research has taken its chosen course, and hence, to decipher how my positionality may have shaped the research process and the conclusions made.

As I have explained above, my affiliation in the broader community of peace and development actors in Finland was central in defining the interest of knowledge, research task and design of this study. The decision to start working on a research project on the chosen topic was a combination of academic curiosity, an ambition for professional development, and quite honestly, a touch of activist spirit. I had written a Masters thesis in International Politics/IR on the management of latent ethnic conflict in Malaysia in the late 1990s, a significant personal learning process through which I had become convinced of there being a connection between development processes and managing (latent) conflict/maintaining/building positive peace. This, coupled with my prior university education heavily weighted on peace and conflict research, several years of working in and with the development and peace NGO sector\textsuperscript{356}, as well as in voluntary positions with peace education and mediation of crimes and disputes (in Finland) made me realize I wanted to learn more about the intersection of these fields. Why? In my work with Finnish development NGOs in particular, I had perceived a distinct gap, manifested in multiple ways, between the fields of development and peace/conflict. Most prominently, I had observed a strong tendency among people working for development (and even humanitarian) organizations (both in the NGO sector as well as among people working for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs) to think of development being separate from questions of peace and conflict. For a number of years I found myself trying to push for a peace and conflict perspective to be integrated into the working agenda.

\textsuperscript{355} Koponen defines reflexivity as the conscious consideration of the foundations of knowledge. From this perspective the researcher cannot (or should not?) represent the pick and mix of information and data of her research as a given. Rather, reflexivity means that the researcher should always make explicit also the background of the data and methods used. See Koponen, \textit{Kehitysmaatutkimus - tieto ja toiminta} 21. Feminist research ethic in turn requires the researcher to take seriously the commitment to reflexivity by reviewing the theoretical approaches of all schools of thought related to the field ones study. The more narrowly the researcher defines his or her literature, the more narrowly s/he delimits the potential audience. See Ackerly et al. 86.

\textsuperscript{356} I have worked in professional roles related to capacity building, networking, training, advocacy, and thematic advice.
of my then employer, the Service Centre for Development Cooperation, KEPA. But it was not happening. Instead, a commonly held and pervasive attitude among many colleagues seemed to be that it was unnecessary for us (the development NGO network) to integrate perspectives of peace and conflict into our work since “we have a good set of peace organizations whose responsibility that is.” Once I also found myself in a heated debate with a friend working in the humanitarian sector about whether or not questions of development and peacebuilding should be on the agenda of humanitarian actors at all. We did not see eye to eye at all. Was I missing something? Or getting it all wrong? At the same time, when looking to Finnish foreign, security and development policies, the story seemed quite different. There seemed to a clear commitment to the connection of development, security and peace in one policy text after another. Yet, for instance the funding mechanisms and opportunities offered in Finland for development, peace, civilian crisis management, and humanitarian work appeared to be separated from one another. Finally, from what I had learned and understood through my work, the way in which many development actors were going about their business in areas affected by or prone to conflict was in no significant way different from work being carried out in more stable countries. I started to wonder if these various gaps I was seeing – in particular the one between policy idea(s) and what was going on in the daily practice of development NGOs’ work – might in fact be a more commonly held and lived reality among the broader community of Finnish development actors. It is from this mosaic of background experiences and perceptions that gave rise to the interest of knowledge about the policy-praxis gap, and the subsequent thematic delineation of the research topic to aid in conflict-affected contexts.

What about the chosen research approach of narrativity combined with appreciative inquiry then? With my NGO background, where the buzz was all about human rights, equity, inclusion, partnerships and participation, it was clear to me that I would adopt as democratic, inclusive and participatory an approach to my study as possible. I figured out fairly early on in the research design process that a narrative approach would be suitable for this study. The idea of constructing one bigger story out of many smaller ones was becoming. Further, the potential of combining appreciative inquiry to narrativity seemed logical to me from my

357 KEPA is an umbrella organization for some 300 Finnish civil society NGOs “who work with development cooperation or are otherwise interested in global affairs.” See www.kepa.fi

358 Personal experience working for KEPA in 2001-2006.
“activist” perspective to the research. I wanted to create a research project in which the participants could learn and receive and develop and share, instead of just being informants to my project. This in turn had a direct impact on my choice of intervention to study as a case – I had heard good things about Finnish water sector interventions in conflict-ridden Nepal. I was convinced there had to be something valuable to learn from them. Lastly, my experience in and a certain professional affection toward organizational and program development, made appreciative inquiry feel like my cup of tea.

In a further attempt to position myself on the insider-outsider axis, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter section, I find myself on both sides. This does not have so much to do with my possibly ambiguous and shifting positions in the world being studied, but most importantly on the design of the study involving a broad range of stakeholders as participants in my research. I believe my experience of working with participatory and inclusive methods in a professional capacity to enhance networking, capacity building and advocacy across a broad variety of actors in the peace-development scene in Finland led me to construct an inclusive research design. This background has also encouraged me to hear out and give voice to a multiplicity of different actors in my study. In order to get the big picture, I felt it to be important to hear stories from all levels of the chosen case intervention. The whole list of project stakeholders and research participants is, however, too long for a meticulous examination of my positioning vis-à-vis each one separately. Suffice it to note that while in some sense(s) I am clearly an insider in the field of Finnish peace and development actors, I am just as obviously an outsider to all of the groups of participants engaged in this study. Having said this, it must be emphasized that I am more distinctly an outsider in reference to the locals of Bhatakatiya than I am for example in reference to some of the Finnish development experts interviewed for this study. I will discuss my positioning(s) vis-à-vis the research participants from Bhatakatiya in more detail below in the section on data collection, and consider how this may have affected our co-production of research data about the studied case intervention.

3.5 Scope and limitations of this study

The chosen case study project of this research, the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project (RVWRMP), ran for almost four years, from October 2006 to the end of August 2010 (Phase I). It continued directly into a second phase,
covering the years 2010-2014/2015, and a final Phase III has been in the making to run from 2016 onwards. The scope of this study is limited to the inspection of the first phase only. The decision to focus on the first phase has the following methodological and practical underpinnings: First, following Polkinghorne’s guidelines as explained above, my choice to use narrative analysis calls for the research to have a bounded temporal period; in other words a beginning, middle and end. Limiting the inquiry to the timespan of the first phase of the studied project gives this narrative analysis a bounded temporal period, as Polkinghorne suggests. The same request is issued by the chosen application of case study research theory also discussed above. Delineating where this study begins and where it ends based on the boundaries provided by the project’s first phase has helped me to clearly define the unit of analysis of this inquiry and to determine the limits of data collection and analysis. The latter has contributed to manageability of the dataset as coupled with in-depth, meticulous reading and narrative analysis of the empirical material. The data thus gathered within these boundaries has provided a sufficiently large empirical material to work on, contributing to the credibility of this research, but one that is still wieldy. Finally, there is one more practical advantage to this choice of scope, which relates to the timing of the research process. The fact that Phase I of the chosen development intervention program coincided with the timing of my research process enabled me to gather data both during and after the project, and to ensure that all of the project documentation data was available for use in this research.

A further limitation of scope of this study is that in placing it within a policy context I have chosen to focus on Finnish policies only. Conducting a similar contextualization exercise with regard to Nepalese policies as I have done with the Finnish ones would no doubt bring a deeper perspective to the study. However, as one of the main anchorings of this doctoral research is its being about Finnish development policy and practice as part of Finnish foreign and security policy, I have deemed it sufficient to concentrate on the Finnish policies.

359 Personal communication, Consultant, 3.12.2015.
360 Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* 21-25.
3.6 On normativity and ethical concerns

In connection to presenting the thematic and conceptual framework of this study in chapter two, I explained briefly my stance in the dichotomy between critical and policy-oriented/problem-solving research. As I disclosed in that chapter, I have aimed to be academically critical in my research despite my leaning toward a policy-oriented approach. I will briefly elaborate the discussion here by making explicit my perspective on normativity in research and how it relates to this study at hand. Secondly, I will briefly shed light on my understanding of research ethics and how I have applied it to this research.

According to Juhani Koponen the notion of a developing country always includes a strong normative, value-laden stance about development. Whatever we choose to mean by development in any given time, is most often conceived of as something desirable, and the idea is that it can be supported and hurried from the outside. Much of what Koponen discusses as being related to development/the notion of a developing country in the context of development studies, can be said to hold true also for peace in the field(s) of peace and conflict research, or conflict resolution. In this sense, seen through the lenses of development studies and peace research, this research aims to produce useful information about a certain kind of development problem, which is related to the idea of building peace/getting over conflict. The aim is to help solve the problem, if not directly, at least indirectly. It is in this way, claims Koponen, that development studies is in itself part and parcel of so-called “developmentalist” thinking and the “developmentalist complex” that emerged at the ruins of the World War II and dissolution of colonial power. This study could thus be seen as a manifestation.

361 See Koponen, Kehitysmaatutkimus - tieto ja toiminta 12. I refer to Koponen here in part because it was he who in the very early stages of formulating this study urged me to consider the normativity aspect.

362 For a discussion of the origins, foundations and development of the field of conflict resolution and its normative stand(s), see Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts 35-62; see also Väyrynen, Missä on kriittinen rauhantutkimus? Normaalitieteen portimarrijat ja kriittiset marginaalit 122.

363 According to Koponen developmentalism is based on the belief in the possibility of creating desirable “development” through well-intended and rationally planned development interventions. The task of development studies in this line of thought is to produce and disseminate the kind of information that can be used in such a development process. See Koponen, Kehitysmaatutkimus - tieto ja toiminta 12.
of a new kind of developmentalist complex, in which the ideas and ideals of development are connected to those of peace.

Hans-Georg Ziebertz in turn claims that the issue of normativity applies to research at large: when a particular problem (or facets thereof) is chosen for inquiry, and the decision for a concrete research project is made, other problems (or facets) are simultaneously excluded. According to Ziebertz this makes the notion of normativity unavoidable in research. He further claims that there are also unavoidable normative goals connected to every research project. They can be either direct goals relating to an immediate purpose or indirect goals referring to the indirect purpose of a research project. In the previous chapters and sections of this dissertation, I have attempted to make explicit what the goals for this research are, so as to disclose my standpoint to the reader.

What about the part of being critical then? According to Koponen, development studies has an important mandate to explore developmentalist thinking and the whole complex critically. Development as such has many interpretations and it can be used for many purposes, also contrary to what is stated up-front. Taking this into consideration, one of the most central tasks of development studies is thus to find out what happens concretely in the name of development (and peace) and how it is done. As such, I have aimed to be self-reflexive and self-critical in this research process by openly placing myself in my various professional roles within the (peacebuilding and) developmentalist complex and the academia. More than striving to be constantly critical and reflexive vis-à-vis the various development actors I have been studying or myself, the point about being critical has meant something else. My aim with this study is instead to challenge and contribute to prevailing knowledge and understandings about (Finnish) development aid in a conflict-affected context, to test the boundaries of that knowledge and possibly peer to the un-disclosed, implicit assumptions behind current understandings of my topic.

Finally, ethical concerns in research are in part related to what has been discussed above regarding normativity and being critical. My understanding of

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365 A prime example of this is the so-called securitization of development discourse, which I touch upon in chapter two.

366 Koponen, Kehitysmaatutkimus - tieto ja toiminta.

367 This has been discussed above in chapter three under the notions of reflexivity and positionality.
what the practice of research ethics entails has its foundations in a course on the
topic by Pirjo Nikander and Arja Kuula at the University of Tampere in the initial
stage of my doctoral studies. On this basis I have perceived the practice of ethical
research as having both a normative as well as a concrete dimension. In claiming
full responsibility for conducting this study as ethically as possible, I have
attempted to internalize the prevailing normative framework(s) of good scientific
practice and ethical codes of conduct, and to voluntarily commit to the guidelines
set forth by the Finnish Advisory Board for Research Integrity.

The ethical regulation in social sciences, from which key concerns of research
ethics are derived, has been driven primarily by institutional demands and
reputation management rather than subject protection. The more traditional
ethical concerns around topics of informed consent (acquiring consent from
research participants after truthfully informing them of what the research is about);
right to privacy (protecting the identity of participants by e.g. anonymizing data and
concealing the identities of research participants in the research report); and
protection from harm (physical, emotional or any other kind) have all been in some
way a concern for and considered in the course of this study. However, as a
departure from the primacy of institutional and reputational demands, I find myself
leaning toward what Harrison and Rooney call neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics – to
which wisdom is integral:

368 Lecture notes, Spring 2007.
369 TENK - Tuttimuseettinen neuvoittelukunta, Responsible Conduct in Research and Procedures for Handling
Allegations of Misconduct in Finland (Helsinki: Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2012).
The guideline defines key elements of an ethically responsible and proper course of action in
research, and emphasizes the honesty and integrity that researchers are required to adopt in their
work. Drawing on these guidelines, I have carried out this research by following principles of
integrity, meticulousness, and accuracy in conducting the study, and in recording and presenting its
results. I have aimed at ensuring that the methods used for acquiring and analyzing data conform to
scientific standards and are ethically sustainable. Further, I have to the best of my abilities taken due
account of the work and achievements of other researchers who have studied aid in conflict, Finnish
development policy and topics close to my research, and aimed at complying with standards of
planning, conducting and reporting my research as well as recording all data obtained in the process.
I have also made known the sources of financing this study both to all research participants during
the study as well as in reporting its results.
370 Robert Dingwall, "How Did We Ever Get into this Mess? The Rise of Ethical Regulation in the
Social Sciences," in Ethics in Social Research, Studies in Qualitative Methodology, ed. Kevin Love (Bingley,
371 Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey, "From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text," in Collecting
and interpreting qualitative materials, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks,
Aristotle presents practical wisdom as an executive virtue that coherently integrates intellectual and ethical virtues to create deliberative excellence...Practical wisdom is thus seen as a way of performing as an educated, skilled, and ethical social actor with carefully constructed predispositions, which automatically seek excellence and well-being. Furthermore, a wise social researcher considers the needs of others carefully to try to find the right thing to do, but in understanding others emotionally, intellectually, or otherwise, is not manipulative.372

Essentially, this has meant for me the recognition that the practice of research involves relationships, knowledge creation, and exclusion, as well as the construction of privilege, as suggested by Lincoln and Cannella.373 I have thus aimed at practicing the concrete dimension of research ethics by constructing an inclusive approach to empirical social science research, which makes me responsible to those (with whom) I have studied first, to my research topic and study second, and to myself last.374 A key aspect in this regard has been the decision to openly explicate the chosen course(s) of action in my research design and process to my research participants and readers alike.

3.7 Research data

The dataset of this study is composed of two main types of primary data. The first consists of archival material and project documentation, whereas the second main type of data consists of interview data produced in interaction with the whole range of stakeholders of the chosen case study project. In addition to these, a third type of empirical data consists of research journal entries, observation notes that I


made during my visit to the project in Nepal as well as e-mail correspondence with my research participants. (See Figure 6 below)

![Diagram](image.png)

**Figure 6.** Types of empirical data used for research

The archival items and project’s documentation in the dataset spans on a time range of almost ten years, from early planning documents in late 2001 to the final completion report of the project and its last steering committee meeting memo in August-September of 2010. The material collected at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Helsinki includes preparatory documents, calls and bids for tenders, consultancy contracts, memos, preparatory mission reports and evaluation reports as well as reports and statements between the ministry officials in Helsinki and the local context. Interacting with the locals in this way also served to build trust between us. Further, I conducted a facilitated workshop discussion with the project's staff at the project support unit after my stay in Bhatakatiya. During this workshop attendees discussed and produced summaries of their discussions on the topic of development in conflict-affected areas. This material was also not so actively used in the narrative analysis, but similarly to the drawings and songs of locals, provided me with a feel for what the thinking among project staff was on these themes.

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375 During my stay in one of the project’s local areas of implementation in Bhatakatiya VDC, I also collected drawings by children of the community and recorded some songs made and sung by one teenage boy and one young lady and mother of an infant in her early 20s. These data items were not actively integrated and used in constructing the narrative of the project, but did provide me with an invaluable glimpse into the locals’ mindset and were significant in shaping my own limited understanding of the local context. Interacting with the locals in this way also served to build trust between us. Further, I conducted a facilitated workshop discussion with the project's staff at the project support unit after my stay in Bhatakatiya. During this workshop attendees discussed and produced summaries of their discussions on the topic of development in conflict-affected areas. This material was also not so actively used in the narrative analysis, but similarly to the drawings and songs of locals, provided me with a feel for what the thinking among project staff was on these themes.
Embassy in Kathmandu. The project documentation in turn includes overall planning documents, project guidelines and manuals, training materials, annual plans and reports, scheme-specific plans and reports as well as memos of steering committee meetings. The project documentation and archival material described here has formed the chronological backbone of the resulting narrative of this study concerning the Rural Village Water Resources Management project. The complete chronological list of all 84 archival items and project documents consulted for this study can be found in annex 2 at the end of this dissertation.

One of the limitations of the archival data was the inaccessibility to political reports written by the Charge d’Affairs as well as sensitive, and all other material concerning bilateral relations. This is based on the Act on Publicity of Government Documents376, according to which this kind of material is to be held confidential for 25 years from date. Another factor limiting my perspective into the contextual and political analysis done on Nepal from the Finnish side was that it had been carried out largely through informal, non-systematized and undocumented discussions, e-mail correspondence and telephone conversations. I learned about this through my discussions with research participants when I started to wonder about the gap in data around the time of the Royal Coup in early 2005. I had found that there was a complete silence in my dataset from approximately mid-December 2004 until mid-April 2005. In order to tackle these limitations of the data I conducted supplementary interviews with key actors among MFA officials and former Embassy employees. Through my discussions with them I learned that there had in fact been quite a lot of “sounding situations out” through informal discussions, but that none of it had ever been documented and archived377. This leads to the final limitation of access to information from the MFA’s and Embassy’s point of view, namely the tragic death of former Charge d’Affairs Pauli Mustonen. From what I have read, and heard about him from so many of my other research participants, I am certain that he would have been a joy to include into this research process.378

The interview data gathered through discussions with individuals representing the whole range of the project’s primary stakeholders constitutes the second main type of empirical research material consulted for this study. This part of my dataset brings the chronology constructed on the foundation of the project documents and archival material to life. The interview data consists of stories, perspectives and accounts of the studied project gathered from interactions with ministerial officials on both the Finnish and Nepali sides; Finnish and Nepalese experts at the Embassy of Finland in Kathmandu; development experts, team leaders and other employees of the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project in Dhangadhi and Mangalsen; officials of the District Development Committee in Achham; employees of an Achhamese NGO (PRSCD) working in support of the project; and finally with local women, children and men in Bhatakatiya, one of the beneficiary communities of the project. I engaged my research participants in a total of 59 semi-structured interviews and/or unstructured discussions for this research between December 2007 and February 2015. 49 of these discussions were digitally recorded (amounting to a total of just under 37 hours of audio material) and ten more were documented by taking hand-written notes. The duration of interactions with people varied from short ad hoc discussions somewhere along the way, to more planned interview settings of up to 90 minutes or more. A complete list of interviews, discussions and other forms of interactions carried out and studied for this research can be found in annex 3. Included in this same annex is also information of the personal research journal entries and observations notes made during a data collection visit to the project in the spring of 2008 as well as e-mail correspondence with various project stakeholders.

The primary limitation concerning the interview data is related to my aim of collecting perspectives from across the whole range of stakeholders. The natural consequence of wanting to sound out several different actors’ perspectives to get a fuller view of the studied intervention is that the number and depth of interactions and interviews with each of the groups / individuals is limited. Secondly, during the data collection trip to Nepal I experienced significant difficulty in gaining access to project stakeholders on the district development committee level in Mangalsen, Achham. The reason for this remained unclear to me. Officially I was...

whose positive and conciliatory nature left a lasting mark on his work community and his circle of friends. Both as a representative of Finland and as a professional, he was also held in wide regard among his foreign colleagues and within the Nepalese government...”

379 I discuss the interview data again in more detail in section 3.8.1 below.
told the DDC people were “very busy with the upcoming elections,” and thus did not have time to meet for interviews. My own feeling was, however, that for some unstated reason there was an unwillingness of the project’s district based staff to facilitate with making the connection. In the end the perspectives from that stakeholder group/level are in any case not represented as strongly in the dataset as the others. Finally, it is quite likely that an additional visit to the project support unit, Bhatakatiya and the district headquarters in Mangalsen ex post the intervention would have produced valuable additional insights to the intervention and my study. Due mainly to constraints related to time and resources, however, the bulk of my interview data was collected on one occasion only during my visit to Nepal in 2008. In order to tackle this last limitation I conducted as many supplementary interviews over Skype, online-chats and over e-mail as possible. Some of the supplementary interviews were with research participants with whom I had established contact already during my initial visit to Nepal, while with others I made the connection directly on these media. This was a possible strategy primarily with participants who were actors in the direct framework of the project. Due to a big turnover of Nepali actors on the side of the administration (both in the district and on the ministry level), I was not able to find and establish contacts with relevant new actors to interview from afar.

3.8 Data collection

The main methods of data collection for this study include archival and document research, interviews and informal discussions, e-mail correspondence, (participant) observation, and writing of a research journal. The project documentation and archival items collected as data for this study were gathered from the archives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Helsinki and most importantly from the project support unit of the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project (RVWRMP) in Dhangadhi, Nepal. The MFA archive had most of the preparatory material concerning the early design and planning phase of the project and some of the project documentation. Through my archival research I also gained access to all key accessible planning documents guiding cooperation between Finland and

380 I did not keep a meticulous and regular research diary after my return from Nepal, but rather tended to carry around a notebook and write down points from informal discussions and interactions with various research participants whom I happened to encounter in various seminars, trainings or other meetings in the Finnish development network.
Nepal. Crucial in terms of access to the complete project documentation, however, was the good contact established with project support unit (PSU) employees in Dhangadhi during my visit to the project in 2008 and sustained thereafter through e-mail and Skype connections and over social media. There were certain individuals who continued working for the project in its second phase, without whose help the collection of the complete project documentation would not have been possible. Also the bond of friendship with some of the research participants among the project support unit employees proved to be invaluable in having the opportunity to reflect upon my study and to discuss the project also in the later stages of research.

In terms of the archival and project documentation data, I collected everything I could possibly get my hands on that had anything to do with the project. As I was gathering the archival materials and project documents, I constructed a matrix of the documents I already had and the ones I believed to be missing. This matrix document was then sent back and forth between my contacts in the project and myself several times to ensure I had “everything.” The interview data, in turn, was partly collected in Helsinki with stakeholders representing the Finnish government at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and those representing the implementing agency, Finnish Consulting Group. The interviews in Helsinki were carried out in 2007 and 2013-2015. The main bulk of the interview data was co-produced together with research participants during a six-week visit to Nepal in 2008. During my stay in Kathmandu at the beginning of the data collection trip, I spoke with stakeholders representing the Nepalese government in Kathmandu at the Ministry for Local Development (MLD) and the Department of Local Infrastructure, Development and Agricultural Roads (DoLIDAR); and thematic experts at the Finnish Embassy. I then moved on to the project headquarters/support unit (PSU) in Dhangadhi in the Far West where I talked with several thematic experts as well as project management. Based on a plan made together with the PSU staff in Dhangadhi, I travelled to one of the project districts, Achham, where I had the opportunity to discuss the project with more of the project personnel as well as district representatives at the district capital in Mangalsen. Finally, my data collection endeavors took me for 10 days to Bhatakatiya village development committee to gain perspectives of the local people on the receiving end of the aid project. As discussed in relation to the limitations of the interview data above, I further conducted a range of supplementary interviews in Helsinki and over Skype and e-mail with various research participants in Nepal and Geneva during 2013-2015.
3.8.1 Interviews

Much of the research process of this study, including reflections on my interactions and co-producing research data with research participants, has been described above in earlier sections of this chapter. I will thus limit the discussion here to three additional perspectives through which it will be possible for the reader to arrive at a better understanding of the way in which the interviews for this research were carried out and with whom, more precisely this part of the data was co-produced. The first point is related to deciding whom to involve in the research as participants, the second speaks to the interviews being informed by feminist research ethics and the third to their creative and unstructured nature.

As discussed above, through my “funnel model of inquiry,” created early on in the process of constructing a research design for this study, I identified the various levels of perspectives that I wanted to integrate into my study. I did this after getting acquainted with the project’s documentation at the archives and my initial discussions with representatives of the implementing agency FCG in Helsinki. On the highest level were the national ministries representing the Finnish and Nepali governments in the project, followed immediately by the Finnish Embassy in Kathmandu. In the middle were the Helsinki-based implementing consultancy (Finnish Consulting Group, FCG), as well as the project management and expert level employees at the project support unit in Dhangadhi. Toward the narrow end of the funnel were the district level actors from both the side of the Nepali government as well as the project in Mangalsen, Achham. Finally, at the tip of the funnel were the project actors (support organization staff) and local people on the receiving end of the project in one local setting in Bhatakatiya VDC. It is based on this (initially mental) picture that I mapped out the relevant groups of the project, and eventually the individuals whom to engage in my research. During one of the first interviews during my data collection trip to Nepal I sketched out the picture I had in mind of the funnel model of inquiry into my notebook (see figure 7). This sketch proved to be helpful not only in identifying people to include as interviewees in my study, but also in establishing understanding with the chosen research participants during interviews later on. By pointing to the drawing in my notebook I was able to quickly show interviewees whom all I was talking to and also to make sure I was getting the big picture of the relevant actors “right.” This often led to suggestions by research participants of other relevant people to talk to. In a sense then, the exact group of research participants within this bigger picture
was selected through a process resembling that of a snowballing\textsuperscript{381} technique. Through this process, I carried out a total of 59 recorded/documented interviews. Apart from some of the discussions on the village level in Bhatakatiya that were attended by 20 or more people, most of the interviews consisted of discussions with just one person or groups of two or three individuals. The complete list of interviews, research journal entries documenting discussions and observations as well as e-mail correspondence consulted as data for this study is compiled in Annex 3.

\textsuperscript{381} Snowballing refers to a technique of identifying people to interview through referrals made by people who know others who might be useful for gaining additional perspectives into the research topic. Chaim Noy attends to snowball sampling via constructivist and feminist hermeneutics, suggesting that when viewed critically, this method can generate a unique type of emergent, political and interactional social knowledge. See Chaim Noy. "Sampling Knowledge: The Hermeneutics of Snowball Sampling in Qualitative Research," \textit{International Journal of Social Research Methodology} 11, no. 4 (2008).
With the variety of different stakeholder groups and individuals that I engaged in this study, there was no one standardized format of interviewing. In addition to the guidance provided for this study by the narrative and appreciative inquiry approaches, there were, however, two additional aspects that characterized, more or less all of my discussions with all of my research participants. The first could be described by borrowing from Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey who claim:

…to learn about [and from] people we must treat them as people, and they will work with us to help us create accounts of their lives [and experience].

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382 Research journal, 27.2.2008.
383 Fontana and Frey, From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text 99.
This is linked, as mentioned earlier in connection to the discussion of the appreciative inquiry, to the feminist undercurrent of this study. Feminist interviewing rebels against any practice of exploiting research participants, and wishes instead to use interviewing for ameliorative, enriching purposes. According to Denzin the feminist researcher presumes himself/herself as someone who builds collaborative, reciprocal, trusting and friendly relations with those studied.\(^{384}\) In other words, following Oakley\(^{385}\), in my interactions with research participants I was open to allowing for feelings of connection and shared experience to emerge and also to embracing those connections. I also aimed at minimizing status differences whenever possible, especially when visiting the project in Bhatakatiya: during my stay in the village I lived with locals in their house without any special arrangements, ate what locals ate, did my morning and evening chores and participated in cooking and washing up after meals, and also gave some thought as to what kind of clothing to wear so as not to look all too strange. I further tried my best to do away with traditional hierarchical situations in interviewing. When talking to European or even Nepali development professionals this was not so much of an issue, but with the locals more difficult to achieve. After all, there was not very much that was “normal” in the setting of my coming to the village as one of the only foreigners ever spotted in the area. I did, however, refrain from formalities such as collecting written informed consent forms, and aimed instead to negotiate consent with my research participants in the form of relaxed conversation and explaining in everyday terms what I was doing and why, and why I wanted to include their perspectives in my book.

Part of downplaying hierarchies in the interview situations was inviting participants to ask any questions they might have had in mind. In a feminist research tradition I also allowed myself to show my human side to research participants, to answer their questions and to express my own feelings. This, I felt came naturally with all of my research participants, although I must admit that my human side and emotions were much more on the surface in my interactions with the people of Bhatakatiya than they were with other research participants. On the other hand, I found myself explaining my understandings of the research topic and answering questions more frequently with the participants on the broader end of the “funnel” than at the narrow end. This is likely to have been a question of more

\(^{384}\) Ibid.

equal power balance between the more educated and exposed participants and myself, whereas for the locals, as it turned out, the fact of my being in the village was more of an odd encounter in and of itself. Further, during my discussions with research participants I aimed to preserve their viewpoints, as expressed in their everyday language and way of speaking. I would eagerly listen to and try to use the wording of the participants in interviews. Working through interpretation, however, was somewhat of an impediment in this regard, a point to which I will return in more detail below.

The attempt to hold on to these aims and principles in my interactions with research participants described above took quite different courses within each of the individual interview settings. At the one extreme there were the one-on-one discussions in high-tech office environments in Helsinki, in a shared language with highly educated and seasoned development professionals. At the other extreme were the, at times fairly chaotic, consecutively interpreted group conversations with illiterate Dalit women while sitting on the step of a toilet under construction, beneath the hot sun in Bhatakatiya, babies crying, children playing and roosters calling in the background (or chickens and chicks sometimes pecking and squeaking right into the digital recorder that I had placed on the ground in front of me). In some ways I felt it was easier to “treat people as people” in the lively village settings than it was in the sterile and impersonal office environments. On the other hand there were the unavoidable and multilayered cultural and hierarchy gaps with the locals, which I felt were largely missing in my discussions with development experts in Finland and even with the experts in Nepal. I will discuss some of the ways of handling the challenges I faced in this respect below in the section on being an outsider.

Another common characteristic of the interviews was their creative and unstructured/lightly semi-structured nature. As the interviews took place in the situational everyday worlds of the participants, it was necessary for me to be creative, attentive and adaptive to the changing settings and circumstances. Despite the fact that I did not ensue a strict interview protocol, I did follow a certain loose and flexible sequence in the interview situations. (See figure 8 below for one example of an interview protocol sketched into a notebook). My interactions with research participants started with ice breaking of some kind, usually in the form of casual chatting about the weather, the news, my walk to the village, the tea/coffee being served, or some other mundane topic, depending on whom I was talking to. I would then usually thank the participants for agreeing to come and talk with me and briefly explain what my study was about. The exact content of these
introductions varied significantly among the various people and groups interviewed. For instance in Bhatakatiya VDC I took to the habit of introducing myself as “a student writing a book,” as opposed to the introduction of being “a doctoral candidate from the University of Tampere interested in the peace-development nexus,” which I used more commonly in other settings. The main point of the introductions was always the same, however: to openly and equally let my research participants know who I was, what I was up to, and what my motivations and interests were. I also regularly attempted to make a particular point of not being affiliated with or paid by the project or its donor. The introductions would sometimes lead to the participant(s) spontaneously asking me questions about my study, the university or my country of origin. When this happened, I happily played along and never denied participants an answer of some kind. Further, I always asked my participants for their consent to recording the discussions (either with a digital recorder or by taking notes), and assured them of anonymizing “who had said what” in my final research report. In only one case did a participant openly admit to feeling awkward about the recorder, but agreed to the recording of our discussion, and then quickly seemed to forget about it as she spoke of her experiences. Most people I spoke to seemed to be relaxed about the question of anonymity and quite a few (particularly development professionals interviewed in Finland) in fact told me that they stood behind their words, and that I could therefore go ahead and “put their words in their mouths, with their names attached.” In order to treat all of my research participants equally, I decided not to disclose any names in the final research report.

386 This way of introducing myself in the village had been recommended to me by two seasoned Nepali development professionals, one a researcher and the other a civil servant. On self-representation, see Fontana et al., 77.
The experience of negotiating informed consent was quite different in my discussions with locals in Bhatakatiya in comparison to all the other groups of people or individuals that I spoke to. During the first days in the village, I always made an effort to bring up the point about anonymity at the beginning of the discussion. We soon realized with my interpreter Bimala, however, that it somehow seemed to confuse people. In between the lines I also felt that emphasizing privacy and promising not to disclose their names somehow seemed to make people suspicious. What was there to hide? Thereafter we were not quite as adamant about explicitly asking for consent first and assuring them that I would not disclose their identities. Instead, we held to the routine of asking permission to talk to people for my study, and brought up the issue of anonymity later on if and when it felt appropriate.

In addition to the introductions and formalities described above, I often asked my research participants (in the case of discussions with people affiliated to the project formally) to start out by telling their personal story about how they had come to work in the field of development and with the project. After this initial
question, each encounter followed a loose thematic structure that I had usually sketched as a mindmap into my notebook in advance (see figure 9 below for an example of such a mindmap).

**Figure 9.** Picture of thematic mindmap for interview

Within the loose thematic structure thus designed for each encounter, the discussions would progress in the largely creative and flexible way as described in the sections on appreciative inquiry discussing research as intervention and the poetic principle.

My encounters with the locals in Bhatakatiya were very different from the discussions with people representing the other stakeholder groups. One main difference was that the encounters in the village were almost never private and one-on-one. Usually they consisted of groups ranging from two or three persons up to 20 people or more. Instead of the thematic questions that I normally asked representatives of the other stakeholder groups, I would often start by asking Bhatakatiyans to tell me about their lives before the war, then about the time of the conflict and finally about their hopes and aspirations for the future. In the spirit of
appreciative inquiry I further always asked locals about any possible “good things” or “positive aspects” of the past that they felt should be carried over to the future. When discussing their experience of the project, usually toward the end of the encounters, I would also ask the locals in the AI spirit what they felt was going particularly well in the project, what they liked the most, and why. Finally I also made sure to give room for expressing any challenges they had experienced in the project.

3.8.2 Being an outsider

Me: …I have heard that the project has attempted to…include all different groups and genders [in its work]. Can you tell me about your experience of this?

Local woman: Good! It has all been good!

Me: What has been good about it?

Local woman: We got the opportunity for discussion along with the men. This was just like our home discussion. We got the opportunity to give [express] our demands also. The most important [thing] is that we got the opportunity to see your experience [as a female researcher coming to Nepal alone] too – because we have only seen foreigners, only from children’s books. But now we have seen you directly, and we can also talk with you!

Me: So (slowly, stretching the word, directing my question to Bimala) – are they saying that before I came, they haven’t spoken to any foreigners – ?

Bimala: Yeah, they have not even seen [a foreigner].

(Group starts talking, many voices responding)

Me: (Laughing behind my notebook in dismay and disbelief, feeling shy and – embarrassed almost)

(Whole group laughing cheerfully with – or at? – me)

Local woman: We have seen [foreigners in pictures], but not directly like this.
Me: So now you know for real that people sometimes look a bit different (still laughing) – Now when I hear this, I’m not surprised anymore that I’m getting many curious looks, and the little children looking at me – are almost afraid of me.

(Everyone laughs)\textsuperscript{387}

The above quote from my interview data and research journal clearly captures how I found myself to be an outsider during my visit to Bhatakatiya. On the other hand it also gives an example of how laughter and emotions functioned as a medium of creating rapport in the lack of a shared language. It was in part through the curious looks exchanged, shared laughter, smiles and play that I found a connection with locals being borne. The quote further provides a glimpse into how I was challenged in my self-representation: in asking about experiences related to the project, the answer contained a reference to my coming to the village. It is of course true that it was precisely the project that brought me to their VDC, but despite having introduced myself as an independent student on my private, self-initiated and -financed book writing mission, it seemed to me that I was quite often perceived as representing the project and/or the government of Finland.\textsuperscript{388} I felt that this clearly had an effect on what participants decided to share with me or leave untold. The response of the local woman keenly telling me “It all has been good!” was a fairly typical first response when talking to locals about the project. Research participants in Bhatakatiya seemed initially unwilling to share anything at all with me about locally perceived challenges related to the project. There was a similar tendency by local and district based project staff to downplay in general the existence of any local problems, tensions and disputes related to the project. One project employee for instance initially told me that there were “no conflicts in Bhatakatiya.” By being persistent in my inquiry about possible challenges or tensions, and listening carefully to my participants while visiting the project and to the data later when analyzing it, I found vivid ruptures to the narrative of “no problems.”

Hearing beyond initial reactions was not just a question of analytical persistence, but largely also about establishing trust with research participants. As explained above relating to my tactic of downplaying researcher-interviewee hierarchies, I felt that the cooking, eating, and living with the locals during my short stay in the

\textsuperscript{387} Interview Bhatakatiya [26] 2008 and research journal 18.3.2008.

\textsuperscript{388} This happened also in my discussions with representatives of the Nepali government, some of whom asked me directly whether I had been sent to do the study by the Finnish MFA.
As mentioned above, whereas we were initially perceived by some locals as (borrowing from one young woman’s statement) someone that the “Kapatini witch [would] come and make ill and eat up” – already by the end of our ten days in the community we had people from nearby houses coming to visit and talk to us spontaneously, and some to say their goodbyes on the night before our departure. Also sticking to my main principle of treating people like people seemed to have made a difference: I responded positively to a request for help by an old man who came to ask me for medication for his aching teeth; I helped the children to wash their hands properly at the water tap, played games with them and asked them to draw pictures with me. I thoroughly enjoyed talking and interacting with the locals, and felt happy and humble to sometimes find myself hearing expressions of reciprocal feelings voiced my way:

Bimala translating for group of local women: On behalf of the group, they want to thank you, that you come from your country to this remote area. You visit with the women, you can mention their problems...you can relate their problems to other areas too. They wish for your study, and purpose of your stay here, they wish for your success.

Me: Thank you, thank you –

During this same interview I came to understand also that my gender, the fact that I was as a female researcher (with a female interpreter) was important in being able to diminish my “outsiderness”:

Local woman: Women came to meet women; it’s a good to us.

Me: Yes (😊 smiling) – I believe in womanpower and sisterhood too!

Second local woman: Hajur, yes –

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389 I limit the discussion of developing mutual trust and empathy here to my experience of collaborating with research participants on the local level in Bhatakatiya. It is here that I spent the most time doing interviews (in comparison to the one-off interview situations with most of the other research participants representing other stakeholders), and also where the issues of developing empathy, trust and rapport were most striking during my research process. In stark contrast to what is discussed here as initial suspicions of the locals toward me and my research, the easy access and extremely trustful and open atmosphere of my encounters with Finnish officials can be seen as taking place on the other extreme. This can be explained by the fairly tight network of Finns working in positions of peace and development, where “everybody knows one another.”


Group mumbling: ramro… hamro lagi – good, good for us.

Second local woman: If you would be a man, we could not say anything to you. So, you are the – just like a sun goddess! … We will not forget you. And remember us. We also remember you. We wish [for] you to come back…

Me: Thank you 😊 - I think that part of my heart will stay here also –

Local woman: ha – (😊 smiling)

Perhaps the most notable example of gaining trust with the locals was when on my last day in Bhatakatiya I was approached by an elderly man, a former Maoist-appointed community leader who had been openly suspicious of me and unwilling to talk to me at all. On our last day in the village, he came to me on his own initiative, indicating that he was now willing to talk with me if I still had time. I felt as if he had watched my actions and demeanor from the side for a full ten days of my stay before he was convinced about me. We ended up having what I felt to be a trustful conversation about his thoughts on the community and its future. He also shared with me his traumatic experiences during the conflict of having been tortured by the army because he was known to be the father of a Maoist. Touched by his story and our connection I felt quite emotional at his farewell:

Local man: Remember our community when you go home –

Me: I will. (Swallowing back tears)

Local man: We will remember you too!392

Establishing trust and self-representation was not always in my control, however, and things sometimes did not go quite as I would have wished. One example of this was when members of a nearby village had heard of my presence in the VDC and had asked Kalawati to bring me to visit with them too. I happily agreed to this and Kalawati arranged for us to meet the people in Parivan in a couple of days’ time. I was unaware that she had agreed on a specific time for us to be at the school, and thus could not on my own part make sure that we would stick to the time schedule. When we showed up late for the meeting, we found only a handful of upset people waiting for us. Luckily for me, this situation of broken trust turned for the better as people started coming back from their houses when they saw that we had arrived and we ended up having a good talk, despite the unfortunate and

unintentional tardiness. I had the feeling that our shared moment of laughter described in the opening quote of this section had an effect on this.\textsuperscript{393}

3.8.3 Working with an interpreter

I worked with an interpreter only during my visit to the local level of the studied project in Achham. Without knowledge of Nepali or any other local languages/dialects of the area of my destination, hiring an interpreter was a necessity as I was planning to engage local Bhatakatiyans in my research. Leslie and Storey rightly point out how knowledge of the local language enables “richer and more textured” data to be generated, and by contrast a lack thereof may lead to inappropriate or even invalid data, in addition to creating feelings of frustration.\textsuperscript{394}

In a similar vein Fontana and Frey remark that the use of interpreters in research processes may contribute to adding layers of meanings, biases, and interpretations. They take note of how this could lead to “disastrous misunderstandings”\textsuperscript{395}, and point out that using specific jargon may be a code that is difficult (to translate and) for research participants to understand. In order to avoid linguistic disasters, in particular related to the latter point concerning jargon, my strategy was to try and avoid using any kind of jargon\textsuperscript{396} at all in communicating with locals.

As I have explained above, the approach to generating data with research participants was based on a narrative mode. In Bhatakatiya this took the form of my gently coaxing people, with the help of my interpreter Bimala, to tell me about their lives in the past (before and during the open conflict), in the present, and finally by persuading them to tell me about their dreams and hopes for the future. This usually worked well, and seemed to easily make sense to both Bimala as well as the locals with whom we were interacting. In this sense I felt that the potential hurdle to understanding posed by jargon was largely avoided in the interpreted interviews.

\textsuperscript{393} Research journal 18.3.2008.


\textsuperscript{395} Fontana and Frey refer here to Freeman 1983, see Fontana and Frey, From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text.

\textsuperscript{396} I refer with jargon to academic, practitioner and policy terminology used as part of the conceptual framework of this research as well as the field of peace and development research in general.
Another strategy that I used in aiming to avoid the challenges mentioned above in working with an interpreter was related to my working relationship with the chosen interpreter. Following Storey and Leslie\(^\text{397}\), I aimed at developing professional rapport with Bimala. Already when recruiting her to become my research assistant and interpreter for the trip to Achham and Bhatakatiya, we discussed in a fair amount of detail on what premises our cooperation would lie. These conversations were continued throughout our travel from Dhangadhi via Doti and Mangalsen all the way to Bhatakatiya. Not only did we talk about what my expectations and hopes regarding her role as my interpreter and assistant were, but I also explained to her the aims and methodology of my research. It was important to me that she would fully understand what my project was about and thus be able to help more efficiently with generating data with research participants.

I was lucky to have found another inquisitive mind and curious person to join me in my process, and felt that Bimala soon had a solid understanding of my project. We also signed a formal contract of employment into which key aspects of our agreement on cooperation was documented. In acknowledgement of the possibility of linguistic challenges leading to inappropriate or invalid data filled with added layers of meanings, biases and interpretations, our contract of cooperation included the following clause:

> It has been agreed … that in translation situations the voice of informants will be respected. This means that the employee will translate as closely as possible the questions (posed)… to the informants and the answers of the informants...\(^\text{398}\)

Related to this, I also discussed the interview situations with Bimala after each of our encounters with research participants. This gave us the possibility to ensure we had understood each other with Bimala, for her to fill in possible gaps in the interpretation, and also for us to reflect on how we had managed to capture the participants’ perspectives. These clarifying discussions usually took place soon after interviews on our walks back from meeting research participants, over lunch, during the evenings while cooking or as “bed time stories” when already in our sleeping bags in the darkness. The notes that I wrote about these clarifying

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\(^{397}\) Leslie and Storey, *Entering the Field* 133.

\(^{398}\) Employment contract between researcher and interpreter/research assistant, signed in Dhangadhi 7.3.2008.
discussions into my journal were subsequently integrated with the interview transcripts, as described above.

Our collaboration with Bimala was generally successful, and she soon proved to be much more than “just” an interpreter of one language to another. Most importantly, she became my didi399, a trusted companion and someone to rely on during an important journey of learning that felt in many ways like a first-ever-voyage abroad.400 Her training as a teacher made her the perfect cultural guide and tutor for me in trying to get a grasp of Nepali culture and traditions and the local realities in Bhatakatiya. I also found out in Bhatakatiya how important it was that the person whom I had chosen to bring with me to the village was female. With her relaxed and friendly manner, Bimala managed easily to establish contact with local women and children. She often spoke on her own with the local women (which I eagerly encouraged her to continue) and seemed to connect with them easily. In this way, I believe having a female Nepali research assistant/interpreter with me helped me not only to understand what was being said, but also to establish contacts and gain trust. In the words of one of the local women we spoke with:

…We cannot share our problems with the men. Just now – you [as women, referring to Bimala and myself] are living here, and we are talking with you. If here would be men, we could not share our feelings and pains with men (present).401

There were, however, some bumps along the road too. Just as Fontana and Frey cautioned, there seemed at times indeed to have been some added layers of interpretation in the interview situations. I also found that some layers and content might have completely gone missing in the process of translation. The following quotes (the first from a conversation I had about my field work in Nepal with one of my research participants around the time that I was transcribing the interviews, and the second from my journal) speak to this:

Me: …we became really good friends (with Bimala) during that time [in Bhatakatiya], but I realize now when I’ve been handling my materials that her translations were sometimes lacking – in accuracy. I’ve been transcribing

399 Didí means older sister and is a friendly term commonly used for women who are approximately in one’s own generation.

400 For a discussion on culture shock in doing development research see Leslie and Storey, 133.

the interviews (recently), and I’ve had the feeling that she may not always have been sharing with me all of what people were saying. And also that she sometimes seemed to be answering my questions on their behalf... I would ask something, and without interpreting my question she would sometimes want to give the answer on behalf of the interviewee.402

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Observations about the interviews:

People in Dalit Tol and elsewhere are not answering my questions, but start instead to talk about something else completely. I’ve tried casually through small talk to lead people toward certain topics and in that way to get people to talk about their lives, roles in the project and their perspectives on the future: peace and development. The strategy is not working. I feel there’s also something not quite right in the translations. We’ve formally agreed with Bimala that translations should be as accurate as possible. Maybe we’re letting our respondents talk for too long, which makes summarizing them a necessity? We must try something else403…

Our good cooperation and trustful relationship with Bimala made it possible to also openly discuss the challenges in working together:

I’m worried about interpretation; we’ve discussed the importance of precise interpretation again today with Bimala. And again we were in agreement on shared principles. Yet tonight she told me directly: “I didn’t actually translate your words to Shunil exactly.” …

I also feel like I’m loosing out on Bimala’s informal discussions with locals. Maybe I haven’t informed her well enough of the significance of informal discussions and her role as my ears?

Despite some of the challenges described above related to working with an interpreter, I feel that my collaboration with Bimala in generating data during my stay in Bhatakatiya enriched and facilitated my data collection rather than posing a threat to it or undermining the research process. I also believe that our professional and cordial relationship, including the ability to share and reflect openly on what was working and what was not in our cooperation, was a key factor in minimizing the risk of ending up with inappropriate data or disastrous misunderstandings.

3.9 Analysis of data

The task of analysis is to derive, find or reveal from research data something that would not necessarily be present and visible in it at face value. In discussing phases of data analysis, Ruusuvuori et al. present a cycle of steps in the research process that shows how analysis can in fact be seen as ongoing throughout the entire duration of a qualitative study. I too find it difficult to define exactly where the data analysis for this study started and where it ends. Specifying the research problem and formulating closer research questions; choosing methods of data collection and gathering the data; getting acquainted with, organizing, and making decisions about what all to include and what to leave out of the eventual dataset; and finally specifying certain rules of interpretation and systematically going through the dataset were in some sense all equally important parts of the analysis. As discussed above in the section on constructing a retrospective historical narrative, the guidelines for carrying out a narrative analysis have formed an important foundation for the data analysis of this study. In that section I have already described some key aspects of the analysis process. In order to further expose to the reader in more detail the systematic way in which I have studied my research data, I will next briefly discuss the analysis of the main types of research data compiled for this study. The sequence of analyzing the various different types of data was intermingled and happened largely in parallel. For the sake of easier legibility I will, however, describe the analysis of project documentation and archival materials as one entity and the analysis of the interviews and research journal entries (including observation data) as another.

3.9.1 Analyzing project documentation and archival material

The analysis of the project documents and archival material started early on in the research process when making the choice of which Finnish development intervention to study as a case. This happened while sitting at the MFA archives and going through all of what had been documented there on the chosen case project thus far. At this point I wrote general notes for myself about aspects of the

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405 Ibid. 12.
project, which I found to be interesting from the perspective of the intervention being carried out in a conflict-affected area. These notes, handwritten into a little notebook, dating to late 2007 formed a foundation to my emerging understanding of the project as a case of aid in conflict. Meetings with representatives of the ministry in charge of the project from the Finnish government’s side as well as with representatives of the implementing consultancy Finnish Consulting Group soon thereafter gave me access to more of the early project documentation that had not yet been archived. Again, as I gained access to pieces of the project documentation, I would read and make notes, and scribble comments into the margins of the copies. The same system of reading and making notes continued in an intuitive mode during and immediately after my data collection trip to Nepal in the spring of 2008.

It was not until much later, when I returned to my research project a-new (after some years of other personal priorities and professional occupations) in the beginning of 2013 that the analysis of the project documentation and archival material took a more meticulous form. This is when I started to systematically compile all of the documents into a chronological list. Concretely this took the form of an excel matrix, into which I placed key information of each document in columns. I recorded information in the matrix of where and in what form (digital or hard copy) I had accessed each document, the name of the documents, the date/year of publication, and information of the publisher/author/responsible actors behind each given data item. In the last column I placed my own comments and observations on what I had found in the texts, interesting excerpts and possible to do – action points. To enhance legibility, I used color-coding in the matrix to highlight findings and action points. This matrix became an important living document with which I was able to keep track of my reading and observations of the enormous amount of information that was included in what eventually added up to some 84 data items. Figure 10 below shows a snapshot of the top of the working matrix in progress. The full list of project documentation and archival material consulted for the study presented in annex 2 is based on this matrix.

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406 I have only included a partial snapshot of the matrix here as an illustration of the analysis process. The full version of 84 documents would have taken up too many pages. Also, part of the information in the comment column is sensitive and can therefore not be disclosed.
Figure 10. Snapshot: list of project documents as working matrix

My reading of each document in the dataset followed a systematic routine. I would first glance through each document superficially to get a general picture of what it contained. I then read the documents (largely in the chronological order into which I had set them in the matrix) in a more focused way. Early in the initial process of studying the texts a list of themes and words (and their variations) evolved that I started to look for methodically in the texts. These included terms such as peace, conflict, war, violence, tensions, instabilities, political situation, fragility, context, analysis, peace and conflict sensitivity, do no harm, risk, and risk management. When I found these key words, their variations or other themes and elements in the texts that I felt spoke to the defined research task in the documents, I would mark them and write notes on them into a separate “raw text” document (referred to as Word doc in the working matrix above). I used this content later as the building blocks for constructing the retrospective historical narrative of this dissertation. I did most of the reading and writing notes by using paper copies of the documents. In the case of the materials that existed only as hard copies at the MFA archives, I wrote my notes into the raw text document directly while at the archives. In the case of
documents containing tens or sometimes hundreds of pages, and to which I had access to digital versions; I also used the word search functions of the computer software that I was using (Word or Adobe Acrobat Reader). It was only through a meticulous reading of the documents word-for-word and sometimes several times over, however, that I was able to catch some of the more interesting finesses. Perhaps the best example of this was the rupture in the narrative related to the choice of the project area as being affected by conflict. The difference in argumentation between two different document versions shifted like night and day.

Although reading and making notes into my raw text document described above was an important part of the analysis process, I found the writing of the chronological narrative in itself to be most significant in the end. Only by bringing the bits and pieces gathered from several sources together did I start to see the bigger picture and to understand how the chosen case project evolved. It was thus that the core narrative of chapters five, six and seven of this dissertation took form. After I had gone through all of the project documentation and archival material in the way described above, I continued the narrative analysis by weaving into the base narrative what I had found from the analysis of the interview data and research journal entries.

3.9.2 Analyzing interviews and research journal entries

Transcribing the recorded interviews and writing out notes from my handwritten research journals was an important preliminary step in analyzing the interview and observation data. Although a painfully slow and tedious process I found this a good way to get closer to the data a-new, especially after a lengthy pause in my research process. In transcribing the interview material I aimed at producing text in which the content of speech is the most important component. Therefore, although the transcriptions are close to full versions of the speech produced during interview situations, I left out most non-verbal parts of the speech such as mumblings and “mmms.” I did, however, include notes on emotions displayed during the interviews, such as laughter, chuckles, smiles or sighs. I followed a certain routine in the transcription process throughout the study. I first organized all of the interview and research journal items into a chronological list from oldest to newest. I then transcribed the audio-recorded data and typed out journal notes. I did this as a consecutive process, integrating the notes that I had taken during the interviews into the transcripts. This handling process culminated in data that
included the speech of the interview situations with my own observations and thoughts on the situation and topic at hand. In the process I simultaneously marked and color-coded sections in the text that were of general interest to my research task. Toward the end of the research process, whenever I co-produced new material with my research participants through discussions and interviews, I would add it to the list and handle it in the same way. Apart from this handling of the interview and research journal notes in parallel, I also typed out all of the rest of my research journal notes from handwritten field diaries. This was a way for me to systematically go through all of the material collected and to refresh my memory of the research process.

After the transcribing and typing out of notes described above, I printed out all of the material thus produced, and organized it in sets of the various groups of people interviewed (see figure 11 below). I then did a more scrupulous reading of the transcripts during which I identified and coded emerging themes, loosely following Ryan et al.\textsuperscript{407} Although I was not aiming for a full out thematic analysis of the data, the theme identification of this part of my dataset proved to be useful in later bringing it together with the base narrative constructed from the project documentation and archival materials. The clusters of themes (and subthemes) that emerged from this analysis process were the following:

- Contextual knowing (conflict/risk analysis)
- Business as usual/mainstream development (conflict ignorance)
- Trust – transparency – participation/inclusion – local presence of project actors
- Low local capacity/lack of competent human resources (missing local governmental structures)
- Project’s support to peace (peace-development nexus)
- Capacity building for conflict management – conflict sensitivity/do no harm
- Tensions and (water source) conflicts – project’s responses & practical solutions

\textsuperscript{407} Gery Ryan W. and Russell Bernard H. ”Techniques to Identify Themes,” \textit{Field Methods} 15, no. 85 (2003). Ryan and Bernard suggest looking to transitions; repetitions; similarities and differences; missing data; theory-related material; and indigenous typologies and categories.
Figure 11. Picture of interview transcripts during the analysis process
4 Contextualizing the Case Study

Case study research and narrativity are two of the central elements defining the research design of this study. As I have discussed above in chapter three, both of these approaches call for contextualizing one’s research. In the same way that presenting key concepts and theories relevant to the studied topic has helped to locate it within the field of IR/peace/development research, contextualizing the case study within the empirical world constitutes an important part of the research design. It helps to place this study as being part of a larger whole from a variety of perspectives. With this aim, I will next illuminate three intersecting spheres (see figure 12 below) to which this study is most immediately linked. The objective here is to provide a view of the broader context into which this study falls. I will first present the set of Finnish policies guiding development cooperation at the time of designing and implementation of the studied project. This will be followed by a brief historical review of Nepal as a conflict-affected area, with particular focus on the Far West and the chosen “case within case” area of Bhatakatiya Village Development Committee in Achham district, which I visited for this research. Finally, I will provide a concise overview of the Rural Village Water Resources Management project as a case of Finnish bilateral development cooperation with Nepal.

Figure 12. Three intersecting contexts of the study
4.1 Finnish policies guiding development cooperation

Placing this study within its relevant policy context entails a reading and descriptive account of Finnish government resolutions and policies affecting development cooperation from the perspective of a peace-conflict-security-development nexus. These include the Government resolutions on Development Policy as well as Finnish Security and Defence Policy texts.

In order to link the research to the international policy sphere, the Finnish documents will be studied reflectively by reading and mirroring them to what is stated concerning a peacebuilding/conflict preventative approach to development in central EU, UN and OECD/DAC policy commitments and guidelines. Primary in this sense are the policy commitments made on the EU-level within texts such as the European Commission Communication on Conflict Prevention 2001, the European Security Strategy 2003 and the 2005 European Consensus for Development as EU-level documents.408

Notions of broad and comprehensive security as well as links between development, peace, security and human rights have long been present in Finnish and international policy texts. Despite the fact that a significant share of Finnish official development assistance goes to so-called fragile and conflict-affected contexts409 the idea of links between peace, security and development has not materialized into systematic action on the level of development cooperation praxis at large.410

This chapter explores the Finnish policy terrain relevant to this doctoral research project, a case study of bilateral development cooperation between Nepal and Finland carried out during 2006-2010. The aim here is to provide an overall description of the policy environment in which the case study project was carried

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408 The focus on EU policies is based on the governmental ruling, according to which the European Union is Finland's most important frame of reference in foreign affairs. Government Programme of Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's Second Cabinet 8.


410 There is a lack of a substantial body of research on the topic of Finnish development interventions in conflict-affected and fragile contexts; this claim is based primarily on personal observations as a practitioner and conflict sensitivity trainer in the field of development cooperation. The fact that Finland did not publish its guideline on working in fragile contexts until the Spring of 2014, further speaks to this point. See Finland's Development Policy and Development Cooperation in Fragile States - Guidelines for Strengthening Implementation of Development Cooperation.
out; to tweak out the policy claims that lie within that environment with regard to the notions of broad security and an assumed peace-development-security nexus.

Development cooperation is the main instrument of development policy, which in turn is an integral part of Finland’s foreign and security policy. The fact that the case study of this research concerns a development cooperation project, constituted the first factor guiding the choice of which policy texts and guidelines to explore as part of the policy context. The second factor was the time frame of the case study (2006-2010). Based on these criteria, the policies explored here include the 2004 and 2009 Government reports on Finnish security and defense, the 2004 Government resolution on development policy, the 2007 Government decision-in-principle on development policy, and the guideline document from 2009 on development and security in Finland’s development policy.

With the aim of finding out what was actually being said in the policy context regarding the inter-linkages of peace, security and development (and which could subsequently be seen as being of relevance to and acting as guidance in conducting development cooperation in fragile and conflict-affected contexts), I set out to read each of the texts by looking for notions of broad security and anything that might have combined peace, security and development – or any combination thereof – in some way. The result in what follows, is a description of each of the policies from these two perspectives. Toward the end of this sub-section on Finnish policies guiding development cooperation, I offer some concluding remarks on the policy context.

4.1.1 Finnish security and defense policy

The overall perspective that Finnish security and defense policies hold on to is that of national security interests. The most important foreign, security and defense policy goals are defined as safeguarding the country’s territorial sovereignty and independence, guaranteeing the security, well being and basic values of the

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411 Both the original Finnish language versions of policy documents as well as the translations into English were studied side by side in order to gain a fuller understanding of the nuances of the language. In the citations I will be using the English language versions and respective page numbering. This explains the difference in the publication year of the development and security guidelines document. The official Finnish language version was published in 2009, but the (unofficial) translation document into English is dated to 2010.

412 I use the American English spelling of the word defense, except for when writing the precise titles of Finnish policy documents, in which the spelling follows the British English version defence.
population and maintaining a functioning society. Finland’s security is, however, depicted in these policies as being closely linked with international developments. Finland is therefore said to take an active and responsible role as a member of the international community that strives to find solutions to global problems, to respond to security threats, and to engage in an active and comprehensive policy of conflict prevention and crisis management, promoting coherent objectives in security, development and trade policies. With emphasis on the importance of human rights policy as a factor shaping security, focusing on the rights of women, children and minorities in particular, Finnish security and defense policies lay the foundation for all national strategies, reports and programs that the Government of Finland prepares on security and international relations.413

Security and Defence Policy 2004

The 2004 report on security and defence policy is a basic position of the Finnish Government, setting out the principles and objectives for Finland’s security and defense policy and providing a framework for its implementation in various policy sectors. The report gives an account of changes in Finland’s international security environment and their effects on Finnish capability as well as on so-called comprehensive security. The assessment of the environment forms the foundation on which Finland’s line of action is then determined.414

Whereas the first two Finnish security and defense reports, dated to 1995 and 2001, were focused respectively on the changed world order after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and European integration, the emphasis of the 2004 report is on cross-border security threats and challenges:

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413 According to the 2009 Security and Defence report these include among others the following documents: the Strategy for Securing the Functions Vital to Society and the Internal Security Programme, the Government Report to Parliament on the Human Rights Policy of Finland, EU-related reports, the Development Policy Programmes, the National Strategy for Civilian Crisis Management, the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Defence as well as the UN Strategy.

414 Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2004, Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2004: Government Report to Parliament 24 September 2004 15. The parts of the 2004 policy text on security and defense described here refer to sections discussing threats, challenges and background factors to international security; responses to identified threats; the line of action of Finland’s security and defense policy; and developing of external capability. It is in these parts of the policy text that hints of a (peace-) security-development nexus were found.
Global problems, development crises and regional conflicts have become increasingly significant for security. Along with globalization Finland’s … security has become increasingly dependent on the broad international situation. The key threats affecting security include terrorism, the threat of the proliferation and use of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts and the use of military force, organized crime, drugs and human trafficking, economic and technological risks, environmental problems, population growth, population migrations and epidemics.415

Although globalization is seen in the report as bringing about opportunities for interaction, it is also perceived as tending to exacerbate global inequalities:

Interdependence among states strengthens common security, but there are risks attached to it… In most instances security problems manifest themselves in the form of violent eruptions and conflicts. Even though a conflict may be triggered by an acute event, there are often deeper economic, social and cultural factors behind the problems.416

The notion of broad and/or comprehensive security417 has been present in Finnish policy already since the country’s first security and defence policy of 1995.418 In it, security was explained as being inclusive of the respect for human rights, the stabilization of the rule of law principle, economic cooperation as well as mutual solidarity for the protection of the environment, in addition to the more traditional political and military aspects of the term. Along the same lines, in its discussion of background factors to security problems, the 2004 report establishes a clear link between development and security, broadening the concept of security a step further in its discussion of “development crises”:

Poverty, inequality and a lack of development are, as such, contributing to social instability. Failure of development policy and social reforms (in response) and exclusion from the benefits of globalization lead to crises that … can create new conflicts and security threats.419

415 Ibid.5, see also 18-19.
416 Ibid. 17-18.
417 The Finnish language document uses the term broad security (laaja turvallisuus), which has been translated as comprehensive security in the English language version of the policy document.
Other factors described in the 2004 policy as contributing to security problems, and with a link to issues of (under-) development are failing states, difficulties concerning human rights, democracy and the rule of law, as well as confrontation between civilizations and action by extremist fundamentalist groups. The notion of failed state is not clearly defined in the policy text. The claim is merely made that if a state weakens or collapses, it often has an adverse effect on both the security of the country’s own population as well as on international security and stability, (thus constituting a problem in terms of development):

Countries that are no longer able to function often become a security vacuum that provides a fertile ground for new global terrorism and organized crime and generates pressures for migration. The risk of epidemics and environmental threats may also grow…(and)… the situation in failing states may aggravate and widen regional conflicts and lead to civil wars that may ultimately develop into international crises.

Further, the realization of universal human rights is described in the 2004 policy as promoting stability and providing a basis for sustainable development. Conversely, serious social inequalities, large-scale violations of human rights, and the lack of good governance and rule of law preventing citizens from taking part in their own affairs are portrayed as generating social instability. The policy defines a final possible background factor to security problems as “resistance arising from cultural differences” toward modernization of a society through developing its social, political and economic systems. At its worst this is seen as having the potential to turn into a “conflict of civilizations” where extremist groups take strong and even violent action. Acknowledging that extremism may have various origins, the policy

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420 The term used in the Finnish language version of the security and defence policy is “sortuvat valtiot,” the exact translation of which would be “collapsing states.” The English language translation of the report uses the term “failing states.” This confusion in terminology may be understood as an indication of the relative novelty of the notion of state fragility in the Finnish policy context at the time of writing the report. For a concise overview of terminology referring to what today is referred to as state fragility see e.g. the GSDRC’s (Governance and Social Development Resource Centre) Topic Guide on Fragile States Claire McLoughlin, Topic Guide on Fragile States [http://www.gsdrc.org/index.cfm?objectid=4D340CFC-14C2-620A-27176CB3C957CE79]; GSDCR-Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, 2012). Here the notion of collapsed state is separated from that of failed state and also of weak state. All of these are used synonymously in the Finnish and English language versions of the 2004 security and defence policy.

makes particular note of Islamic radical movements that have gained strength in the course of “the last few years.”\footnote{191}

Despite the fact that the most important duty of all countries is defined as ensuring the security of their own citizens, with its focus on the trans-boundary nature of international security threats and challenges, the 2004 policy stresses the importance of increasing bilateral and multilateral cooperation as well as establishing legally binding procedures in response to the threats identified. Following from this, the central security policy strategy for the international community is outlined as “supporting efforts to make democracy, the rule of law, good governance and human rights a basis for sustainable stability and security in transition countries, crisis areas and weak states.”\footnote{423} Although supporting transition countries’ internal reform processes is not portrayed as a novel instrument of international security policy as such, the 2004 report foresees greater compatibility in matters concerning peace, security and development between international financial institutions and UN bodies as becoming a key issue.\footnote{424}

Further parts of the 2004 policy text that pointedly establish a link between security and development are the discussion of appropriate ways in which to respond to the security threats and challenges identified earlier in the document, as well as the section on Finland’s line of action. In solving of security problems the policy text places emphasis on the link between the policies on development, human rights and security: “development policy and development cooperation are also instruments of security policy.”\footnote{425} Long-term development cooperation is described as having a preventive effect on conflicts. It is seen as strengthening economic resources and encouraging developing countries to carry out necessary administrative and political reforms in order to make them less prone to crisis and violence. In addition to this the targeting of development cooperation in crisis areas is also said to have a “direct security policy impact.”\footnote{426}

Moreover, the policy report calls for all actors involved to act in a coordinated manner, and maintains that the prevention and settlement of conflicts together with stabilizing and reconstructing societies requires long-term commitment from the international community. The action and the range of instruments needed are

\footnote{191}{Ibid. 19-20.}
\footnote{423}{Ibid. 30.}
\footnote{424}{Ibid. 33.}
\footnote{425}{Ibid. 83.}
\footnote{426}{Ibid. 37.}
portrayed as a continuous process and an entity comprised of development policy, early warning, conflict prevention, as well as military and civilian crisis management. These are all carried out during various phases of conflict: the acute stage of crises, aftercare thereof, and the reconstruction phase.427

Finally, in a section on conflict prevention the 2004 policy text states that Finland aims to contribute to the prevention of conflicts in accordance with the conflict prevention program approved by the EU in 2001. This is done through participation in international and regional organizations, through bilateral political relations and projects with long-term partner countries and other countries, as well as through the use of financial instruments. In so doing, Finland is said to contribute to the fostering of peace, security, human rights, good governance and democracy. In concrete terms, the policy makes a commitment to include methods and systematic actions in view of preventing conflicts and promoting internal and regional security.428

Security and Defence Policy 2009

The 2009 report on security and defense policy429 brings forth elements of the notions of broad/comprehensive security and a security – development nexus with increased vigor. Security is defined as referring to general preconditions for survival including state sovereignty and its decision-making authority, lives of individuals and cultural distinctness of a population group. ‘Common430 or human security’ is part of the definition, in addition to the more traditional state-centered understanding of security. As such, this broadened concept of security embraces issues that as such may not be perceived as threats, but if exacerbated, could jeopardize Finnish security. Examples of such threats range from terrorism and

427 Ibid.37, 84.
428 Ibid. 91.
429 The parts of the policy document in which the notion of broad/comprehensive security and/or the link between security and development were identified are the sections discussing international security developments; Finland’s security and defense policy guidelines; as well as the sections on Finland’s external action; crisis management; and most prominently in the section on security and development as part of Finland’s security.
430 The term common security is from the official English language translation of the Finnish policy text. The word used in the Finnish language policy text is yhteisöllinen turvallisuus, the more direct and precise translation of which would be communal or community security.
armed aggression to network interference, natural disasters and failures of technical infrastructure.\textsuperscript{431}

Much in line with the 2004 policy, the 2009 report also highlights the far-reaching impacts of the security threats and challenges in an interdependent world. As a consequence, new approaches are called for in response:

Security threats are typically difficult to foresee and provide little early warning... in addition to preparedness and response capabilities, attention must be paid to prevention and security-building measures.\textsuperscript{432}

The changed nature of crises and conflicts since the end of the Cold War is reiterated in the 2009 policy; conflicts are described as predominantly intra-state, increasingly asymmetrical, involving more non-state actors than before, and widely targeted at civilians. It is with regard to the complicated web of reasons for and dynamics of modern conflicts that the policy text establishes a vivid link between security challenges and questions of development:

In addition to political and economic grievances, historical reasons as well as ethnic and religious tensions often lie behind conflicts. Conflicts are frequently fanned by the illicit arms trade, easy access to weapons and disputes involving control over natural resources...Security challenges are increasingly linked to a lack of development, manifested in poverty and inequality, as well as other shortcomings in the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.\textsuperscript{433}

Whereas the 2004 policy still spoke somewhat indistinctly of “collapsing” and “failing” states, the 2009 policy introduces and clearly defines the concept of state fragility, also in part explaining the connections between matters often connected to (under-) development and (in-)security:

Fragile states are either incapable or unwilling to carry out their fundamental tasks: ensuring security, establishing and maintaining legitimate political institutions, furthering economic development and providing basic services to their citizens.

\textsuperscript{432} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{433} Ibid. 14.
Corruption, poor governance, discrimination and abuse of power destroy people’s trust in the authorities. They are also often the root causes of increasing lawlessness and the strengthening of extremism. Turmoil in society especially exposes fragile states to politico-economic tensions, which may result in acts of violence.  

Social inequalities, absence of democracy and the rule of law as well as violations of human rights – all factors commonly associated with development challenges – are listed in the 2009 security and defense policy as further causes of conflicts and instability; and thus insecurity. Here again a link between security and development is established.

Further, in sketching out Finland’s security and defense policy guidelines based on the analysis of international security developments, the report puts forth the idea that in striving for increased security the means of development policy and action may be pursued, alongside other relevant instruments:

Finland contributes to crisis and conflict prevention...by means of development, human rights and arms control policies, and by participating in international crisis management.

Through a coherent development policy Finland helps societies respond to the needs of their citizens, eliminate the root causes of threats and advance stability, security and sustainable development...

Finland supports preventative action, mediation and peace processes, post-conflict reconstruction as well as post-crisis transition from crises and natural disasters by means of development cooperation.  

A similar line of thought – where security challenges are thought as best met with a comprehensive approach – is discussed further in connection to Finland’s external action and crisis management in particular:

Crises and conflicts call for a comprehensive and systematic approach from crisis management organisations and participating states. Humanitarian aid and development assistance must be considered alongside crisis management instruments. Finland’s actions at national level should strengthen and supplement the efforts of the international actors. A comprehensive

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434 Ibid. 15.
435 Ibid. 75.
approach calls for better harmonisation between national planning, coordination and resourcing.436

Finally, the 2009 policy report accentuates the connection between development and security with a separate section titled “security and development.” Here, the policy highlights Finland’s determination to bring about a comprehensive approach to controlling and preventing conflicts as well to so-called post-conflict management. Acknowledging that security and development actors have separate, yet mutually complementary, roles and responsibilities, the 2009 policy text reiterates Finland’s commitment to promoting coherent crisis management, development cooperation and humanitarian aid in line with EU Council decisions concerning security and development.437

The capability of societies to respond to the needs of their citizens and eradicate root causes of security threats is portrayed in the 2009 policy text as an essential way of preventing conflicts. This ability is said to have an impact also on diminishing structural inequalities and improving the opportunities of the underprivileged to make a difference in their individual and national development. The report maintains that Finland lends its support to this type of capacity building through long-term development policy, which yet again reinforces the line of thought regarding a security-development nexus in the policy: a contribution to the overall objective of diminishing security threats is attempted by means of development. By the same token, the policy report describes Finland’s support to peace processes, reconciliation of armed conflicts, post-conflict reconstruction, development of post-conflict societies’ security structures as well as the disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants as being delivered through means traditionally employed in development cooperation.438

In comparison to earlier security and defense policy reports, the prominence of interconnections between development and security is noticeably increased in the 2009 report. In terms of the operationalization of the nexus, however, the policy text leaves its reader with limited instructions, giving guidance as follows:

Finnish assistance activities emphasise local ownership and responsibility… (with) (t)he objective… to promote good governance and the rule of law.

436 Ibid. 84.
437 Ibid. 105-106.
438 Ibid.
Environmental issues and sustainable use of natural resources as well as HIV/AIDS prevention are taken into account in peacebuilding.

Particular attention is paid to coherence between crisis management and development cooperation. \(^{439}\)

### 4.1.2 Finnish development policy

Development policy is an integral part of Finnish foreign and security policy. Based on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established by the United Nations, it aims to contribute to the global effort to eradicate poverty through socially, ecologically and economically sustainable development. Another goal of development policy is to strive to improve the effectiveness of measures taken, and their coherence with other policy sectors. In other words, development policy refers further to “coherent activity in all sectors of international cooperation and national policy that have an impact on the status of developing countries.” \(^{440}\)

**Development Policy 2004**

The 2004 development policy resolution \(^{441}\) states that the joint commitment of the international community toward poverty reduction means that the policies of industrialized countries should be considered in a more comprehensive manner and in a way that allows comparisons to be made. Among the factors to be compared are e.g. harmonization of procedures and the contributions of industrialized countries to the promotion of peace and security.

The 2004 development policy pinpoints armed conflicts, crises and instability with all their eventual repercussions as the foremost threat to security, and maintains that it is with the help of development policy instruments that these threats can be averted. The resolution also iterates Finland’s commitment to the

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\(^{439}\) Ibid.


\(^{441}\) Development Policy, Government Resolution.
UN Millennium Declaration, including the recognition of the central importance of peace, security and disarmament.442

Further, the 2004 resolution refers to Finland’s own experience of the development of Finnish society in five decades from a poor country with small production capacity, and recovering from two wars, into a competitive welfare state and information society. This historical background is portrayed as providing a firm foundation for Finland’s involvement in international development policies. “Finns have learnt that security and stability, both inside the country and in the surrounding regions, are prerequisites for development.” From this perspective the 2004 development policy stresses that peace and security are prerequisites for achieving sustainable results in development processes aiming for poverty reduction.443

Together with long-term development cooperation, claims the resolution, Finland targets support specifically at the prevention and management of crises and post-conflict recovery in developing countries. Development policy is thus portrayed as being a part of Finland’s security policy. From that point of view, the task set for development policy is to bring about sustainable development that is capable of dealing with the causes of conflicts and violence, and to eradicate them:

Development policy can also contribute to solving existing conflicts, and development work plays a key part in recovery from them. On the one hand, the question is one of starting and maintaining decade-long development processes, and, on the other, of reacting speedily to what happens in the world. At the same time, promoting security and stability is a key factor in trying to achieve the goals of development policy. Violent conflicts are the most serious obstacles to development in many developing countries. Poverty, injustice, the inequitable distribution of resources and bad governance are also breeding grounds for conflicts, violence and terrorism.444

442 Ibid. 5.
443 Ibid. 8.
444 Ibid. 14.
In discussing sustainability in development policy and cooperation, the 2007 development policy claims that social stability is a precondition for all development. Progress is not possible in a crisis situation, and therefore “(W)e must pay particular attention to societies suffering and recovering from crises.” According to the 2007 policy, every effort should be made to prevent crises in advance, and comprehensive crisis resolution and a return to peaceful and safe conditions should be supported. Sustainable development, the policy claims, depends on stability and security, progress towards democratic governance based on the rule of law, the consolidation of human rights – with a particular focus on the rights of women – as well as support to civil society. The deed of development policy is thus to strengthen security in the wide sense of the word, claims the policy.

The 2007 development policy is founded on the respect for and promotion of human rights, a key focus also of Finnish foreign and security policy. According to the 2007 policy, Finland stresses a “wider security concept,” thereby strengthening the link between security, development and human rights. This calls for extensive international cooperation as well as decisive national action across administrative boundaries.

In its own development cooperation, the policy describes Finland as being committed to pursuing goals and approaches jointly approved in the EU and the UN, with the eradication of poverty and ecologically sustainable development being the most important objectives. While emphasizing Finland’s promotion of economically, socially and ecologically sustainable development and placing particular weight on climate and the environment, the policy program makes the claim that Finland stresses crisis prevention and support for peace processes as an important element in the promotion of socially sustainable development.

Finally – and most pertinently in terms of the theme of this study – in the chapter discussing bilateral cooperation and long-term partner countries, the development policy program recognizes that several of Finland’s partner countries

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446 Ibid. 15.
447 Ibid. 16.
448 Ibid. 17.
are either in a state of conflict or recovering from such crises. Further, the policy states:

Support for these countries calls for a comprehensive approach and partnership in which military and civilian crisis management on the one hand and development cooperation and humanitarian assistance on the other are coordinated to achieve the best possible overall effect.\textsuperscript{449}

The policy goes on to suggest that the forms of development cooperation carried out in societies experiencing a violent crisis “must be carefully chosen and different methods must be used at different stages…” (and that) Post-conflict cooperation must focus specifically on stabilizing conditions by supporting the peace process.”\textsuperscript{450}

\textbf{Development and Security in Finland’s Development Policy}

The Development and Security in Finland’s Development Policy – Guidelines for Cooperation document\textsuperscript{451} pinpoints violent conflicts and fragile states as one of the biggest development challenges of our time. With this in mind, it guides the implementation of the Government’s Development Policy Program in promoting social stability and security in developing countries. The document highlights the complementary but distinct roles of development and security, and outlines the priorities for Finland’s work in terms of policy-level and operational activities financed through development cooperation. Perspectives from several other texts defining Finland’s stand on the issues of development, security and peacebuilding are also compiled into this guideline.\textsuperscript{452} As such, it largely reiterates what is said in the 2004 and 2007 development policy programs about Finland’s emphasis on a “comprehensive concept of security,” confirming the inter-linkages between security, development and human rights. Comprehensive security is defined in the

\textsuperscript{449} Ibid. 31.
\textsuperscript{450} Ibid. 31-32.
\textsuperscript{451} Development and security in Finland’s development policy: Guidelines on cooperation (Helsinki: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2010).
The development and security guideline document stresses that supporting socially sustainable development requires coherent action in all sectors and policies of the Finnish Government. The promotion of comprehensive security through development policy is illustrated in the document with a diagram (see figure 13 below), calling for comprehensive development policy in conflict prevention, resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. Seen in this way, development policy in its various forms covers the entire conflict cycle from the envisioned pre- to post-conflict phase, and comprises coherent activities in all areas of international cooperation and national policy that have an impact on the conditions of developing countries and development throughout the world.
Social structures as well as people’s attitudes and actions are constantly interacting with each other. Depending on the situation, the result can either be peace or conflict – security or insecurity.

The prescription of the development and security guideline is a well-targeted development policy supported by development cooperation in order to strengthen the development of social structures, cultivate attitudes to promote peaceful coexistence and help protect and integrate excluded groups in becoming part of society.

Finally, the document calls for “special attention and actions” when working in post-conflict situations and e.g. in integrating former participants to conflicts into normal life. The reactions of people in conflict prone situations as well as external actors’ presence and activity are described in the guideline as having a significant impact on the onset of a conflict or its prevention.

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453 This diagram is from the guideline document *Development and security in Finland’s development policy: Guidelines on cooperation* (Helsinki: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2010) 5.

454 Ibid. 6.

455 Ibid.
In terms of closer guidance for working with fragile countries and situations, the development and security document refers to the OECD/DAC Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations:

According to the principles, stability in fragile states requires a comprehensive investment in the security situation, building state and local government institutions responsible for basic services, the development of the private sector, as well as the creation of an enabling environment for business activity.\textsuperscript{456}

The development and security guideline document further claims:

(Implementation of the OECD/DAC principles) requires concerted action so that military assistance, civilian crisis management operations and development cooperation strengthen the ownership of the efforts by the local government, and create an environment conducive for development. The various actors need to have a common vision and their work must be based on a clear division of labour and be well-coordinated. Furthermore, coherence among various policy fields and sectors as well as a realistic understanding of the challenges of the situation and the required resources are necessary.\textsuperscript{457}

\section{4.1.3 A (peace-) security-development nexus?}

A central point of departure of this doctoral thesis research is the perceived gap between the policy language regarding the connections between peace, security and development and the way in which this language and idea(s) are translated concretely into the practice of development interventions in conflict-affected contexts. Before embarking upon an analysis of the practice of development assistance from the perspective of this assumed peace-security-development nexus, it has been necessary to gain a fuller understanding of what it is that the policies interacting with praxis actually commit to, whether and how the connections between peace, security and development are portrayed. This is what I set out to do in this chapter, which also constitutes one of the three contexts of the case study project as defined in the research design.

\textsuperscript{456} Ibid. 8
\textsuperscript{457} Ibid.
I approached the chosen five policy texts in this chapter at face value; simply looking for anything in the documents discussing broad security, peace, security and development – or any combination thereof. As a result I have described in the previous pages what I found in each of the policy texts. At the outset, I started writing this chapter with a working topic including the word peace as one of three equally weighted components of a suspected nexus. My assumption was that peace would be fairly strongly present in the texts, and moreover, that it might refer in the Finnish policy context to something reminiscent of development, or Galtung’s understanding of positive peace. I come to these concluding remarks of this chapter, however, by placing peace in brackets. Why? Although the word peace is indeed present in the policy documents studied, it is clearly left in the shadows of security and development. A second fundamental observation regarding the emergence of peace in the policy texts is that it is not defined in any way. Nevertheless, peace – whatever is implicitly meant by it – does carry some weight: throughout the policy documents Finland is said to foster peace; support peace processes, peacebuilding activities and the return to safe and peaceful conditions; promote peace, security and peaceful coexistence; recognize the central importance of peace, security and disarmament; and stress that peace and security are prerequisites for achieving results in development processes aiming for poverty reduction. A closer analysis of the various uses of the word peace would be needed in order to be able to come to any firm conclusions as to the meanings attached to it in the policy texts. Quite often when peace does emerge in the texts, it seems, however, to be used in the sense, which Galtung refers to as negative peace – or in other words, the absence of violence. On the other hand, the prominence of the call for respect and promotion of human rights in the policies does speak on behalf of a positive peace perception as well.

Whereas the meaning of peace is left undefined in the policy context, security and development are more clearly attached to certain specific content. Development (or lack thereof) is consistently linked in the policies to internationally agreed goals and the overall objective of poverty eradication, and portrayed as being composed of economic, social and cultural factors. Development problems quoted in the policy texts range from violations of human rights, social inequalities, economic grievances and poverty to the absence of development.

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democracy and the rule of law, confrontation of civilizations as well as historical, religious and ethnic tensions.

It is these abovementioned “problems in/lack of development” that are portrayed in the security and defense policy texts as being at the root of, or as causing cross-border security threats. Security is distinctly defined along the lines of what is commonly elsewhere defined as *broad security*\(^ {459} \) and including elements of the notion of human and citizens’ security in addition to the more traditional state-centered understanding of the term. The discussion of security suffers of overall terminological inaccuracy in the policy documents, stemming from varying, inconsistent and confusing uses of the terms broad and/or comprehensive security. The concept of broad security (laaja turvallisuus) in the original Finnish language versions of the policy documents is more often than not translated as comprehensive security in the official English language versions. This easily leads to more confusion than clarity, as the notion of comprehensiveness is also used in reference to what might also be coined a holistic approach\(^ {460} \) to encountering security and development challenges, as well as building peace. In other words, the term comprehensive is used both to describe whose security is in question, as well as the approach to perceived security threats.

What about the security-development nexus then? All of the policy documents studied here revolve largely around the same elements and wordings. It is the order of the cause-effect equation that differs. The security and defense policies take the lack of development as a starting point from which to identify threats to security, which are further described as being manifested in violence and conflicts. The development policy perspective on the matter of the nexus, on the other hand, takes as its point of departure the view that armed conflicts, violence and instability constitute the biggest obstacles to development in addition to being the foremost threats to security.

The prescription of what should be done about the identified threats to security and development largely converge in all of the documents studied. It constitutes a grand list of many different kinds of activities. There is a strong call for coherent action in all sectors and policies of the Finnish Government, with development and arms control policies mentioned specifically. The action and instruments needed in response to the complicated web of causes and effects of the security-


development trap are defined as promotion of security and stability; long-term development cooperation; support to democracy, rule of law, good governance, human rights, early warning, conflict prevention, civilian and military crisis management, crisis resolution, post-conflict recovery; focusing on transition countries internal reform processes; support to and participation in peace processes, mediation, reconstruction and crisis transition. What the policy documents leave open are the priorities and interconnections of all of these various parts of the puzzle.

The how –part of the prescription to tackling the security-development nexus (and most significant in terms of the study at hand) also remains vague. The policies call for coordinated action and long-term commitment; better harmonization between various actors’ roles and responsibilities; a comprehensive approach to controlling and preventing conflicts; emphasis on local ownership and responsibility; and promotion of coherence between crisis management, development cooperation and humanitarian aid. The document on development and security in development policy document from 2009 is the first of the Finnish policy texts to take note explicitly of OECD/DAC guidelines in the question of linking development to conflict prevention. Referring to the Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations, the policy emphasizes that stability in fragile states requires comprehensive investment in the security situation, building state and local government institutions responsible for basic services, development of the private sector, as well as creation of an enabling environment for business activity. Further, the development and security guideline document advises to “choose development cooperation carefully,” and to “use different methods at different stages.” Finally, the document stresses the importance of a “realistic understanding of the challenges of the situation as well as the resources required.”

This reading of Finnish security, defense and development policy texts leaves the reader with a grand list of many good and several important things: points to be considered mainly by Finnish decision makers. The (peace-)security-development nexus described in the policies gives seemingly little in terms of what might be considered useful for development cooperation practitioners dealing with


the realities of conflict-affected contexts in their day-to-day work. As discussed above, Alava et al. come to the same conclusion by noting that “not only are … (conflict and post-conflict) situations immensely complex and difficult to manage, but … the international discourse and guidelines for such situations (also) still suffer from many gaps and deficiencies and as such cannot provide detailed guides for action.”

It is precisely this gap between vague policy language and the very concrete peace-security-development related challenges for development practice arising from a conflict-affected context that I aspire to contribute to bridging with this research.

### 4.2 Conflict-affected Nepal

I will next provide a general overview of the country setting into which the studied development intervention was placed. The focus here is on the more recent conflict-related history of Nepal, surrounding the planning and implementation of the project studied, thus dating from the early 1990s up until the latter part of 2010. This will be followed by a closer look also at Achham district and the situation of Bhatakatiya VDC, which was been chosen as the case-within-case of this study.

Modern Nepal emerged as a unified state in the late 18th century. The country has been a monarchy since the beginning, but the power of the monarch has seen many rises and falls throughout history, often coupled with open violent conflicts. The roots of the most recent uprisings in Nepal are in the turbulent transition from an absolutist monarchy to a system of constitutional monarchy under multi-party democracy. This happened in the early 1990s after several political parties came together and established a popular pro-democracy movement

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463 Alava, *Exploring the Security-Development Nexus Perspectives from Nepal, Northern Uganda and 'Sugango'*.  
464 Nepal is a land-locked country between India and China. With an area of 147,181 sq km, Nepal is home to 26.6 million inhabitants representing over 120 ethnic groups and 100 languages. The population density is 181/sq km and an average family size is 4.7. The share of female population is 51% and 48% of the people are children and youth under 18 years. Around 83% of the population lives in rural areas and 17% in urban areas. In addition, some two million Nepalese have migrated to live outside the country mostly as labor migrants. Nepal is divided into five development regions and 75 districts comprising 58 municipalities (cities and towns) and 3914 village development committees (VDCs) with an average of some 6000 inhabitants per VDC. See *Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Nepal, 2013-2016*, (Helsinki: Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2014) 7.
(People’s Movement, *Jana Andolan*). Demonstrations and rallies, accompanied by violence, arrests and casualties, were held throughout the country. As ethnic groups demanded official recognition of their cultural heritage and linguistic traditions and demonstrated against the monarchy, political unrest became widespread. The goal of the pro-democracy movement was to establish a more representative democracy and to end the centrally controlled partyless *panchayat* (village council) system of government that had been established in 1962. The panchayat structure saw its final days in 1991 and constitutional monarchy under multiparty democracy was introduced after general elections were held. Having previously operated in exile and behind the scenes, the various communist and other parties and coalitions became a powerful presence in the newly constituted parliament. Nepal continued its gradual move toward a multiparty democracy.

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465 The people’s movement of 1990 has elsewhere been referred to also as *Janandolan I*, in distinction from the popular uprising of April 2006 (*Janadolan II*). See e.g. Stine Heiselberg et al., *An Inclusive Peace Process in Nepal and the Role of the EU* (Helsinki: Crisis Management Initiative, 2007) 6-7.

466 The elections were deemed "generally fair, free, and open" by an international election inspection team. Yet, although over forty political parties registered with the election commission, only twenty – mostly small, communist splinter groups – were on the ballot. The Nepali Congress Party won 110 of the 205 seats in the House of Representatives, and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist) won 69 seats. See Savada (1993).

Figure 14. Map of Nepal with boundaries and municipalities\textsuperscript{468}

Marked by the historically embedded caste system, elite hierarchical structures as well as gender and other social hierarchies, social life has traditionally been highly stratified in Nepal.\textsuperscript{469} This has shaped much of the country's political, economic


Nepal is divided into 75 districts, 58 municipalities and 3914 village development committees (VDCs). The development efforts of VDCs and municipalities are supported by district development committees (DDCs), which in turn are supported from the central national level. Earlier the DDCs consisted of locally elected representatives from various political parties working under the authority of the Local Self-Governance Act. Centrally and locally recruited office holders have now filled these positions. The DDCs receive block grants from the Ministry for Local Development (MLD) and they also mobilize local resources through a variety of taxes, service charges and fees. As chief administrators of the district, the Chief District Officers report to the Ministry of Home Affairs and carry responsibility for maintaining law and order. The Local Development Officers (LDOs) also play a crucial role in district level planning and development, in addition to acting as secretary to the DDC. They report to the MLD. In addition to this several other ministries and service providing corporations have regional and district level offices. See Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Nepal, 2013-2016, 32.

\textsuperscript{469} The UNDP has defined seven sources of inequality and exclusion in 21st century Nepal: 1. Unequal gender relations stemming from traditional socio-cultural structures that define the formal and informal rules for women’s participation in relation to opportunity, decision-making, access to resources, and control over them; 2. Caste differentials due to social stratification by the hierarchies stipulated by the Muluki Ain (the national code of 1854) that characterized Dalits as “untouchable”;

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and social life, and has been pointed to by many analysts as underpinning many of the problems experienced in Nepal’s young democracy. The dramatic political changes of 1990 raised popular expectations of improved equality, reduction of poverty and social progress. The living conditions of most people, however, remained poor. As the political elite in the capital squabbled for power and was reluctant to embrace more open political and economic systems, the new democratic system was quickly tarnished in the eyes of the broader population. The vague constitutional power-sharing arrangements between the parliament and the King, and the deeply divided political landscape led to a situation in which the expectations of the people were not met, and the structural issues and injustices in Nepal were left unaddressed. The politically vulnerable situation was further aggravated by the prevailing and extreme poverty in the country.

It was against the backdrop described above that the CPN-M (Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist) publicly launched its armed struggle against the government in early 1996. The so-called “Peoples War” was introduced as a call for a revolutionary transformation of the society. The CPN-M quickly gained control of large parts of Nepal's rural areas and managed to mobilize (some by coercion) vast numbers of rebel fighters. By 1999 the insurgency affected half of Nepal's 75 districts, and in some of them the Maoists ran parallel administrations, enforcing

3. Caste and ethnicity differences resulting from the norms and socially defined practices of dominant caste groups that define the degree and form of discriminatory practices towards disadvantaged Adivasi Janajati; 4. Linguistic discrimination that stems from the domination of the Nepali language over the other native tongues and the consequent exclusion of non-Nepali speakers; 5. Religious differences, which act similarly, favoring Hinduism above other faiths and belief systems; 6. Spatial exclusion that derives from isolation in geographic areas remote from Kathmandu and other urban centers, or from state-biased policies that affect the disadvantaged regions; and 7. Geo-political discrimination: an exclusion linked to location that also reflects socio-political differences, notably the distinction between the Pahadi (Hill dwellers) and the Madhesi (plain dwellers). All these stratifications have been reinforced by government policies, particularly those proclaiming Nepal a “Hindu Kingdom” and Nepali or Khas as “the only official language” – simultaneously ignoring Nepal’s multi-religious, multinational, multicultur, and multilingual character. See United Nations Development Programme, Nepal Human Development Report 2009: State Transformation and Human Development (Kathmandu, Nepal: United Nations Development Programme, 2009) 18.

470 Heiselberg et al., An Inclusive Peace Process in Nepal and the Role of the EU 6-7.
472 The CPN Maoists submitted a 40-point demand list to the government on February 4th 1996, addressing a wide range of social, political and economic agendas. Included in the list was a warning that militant struggle would follow if the demands were not met. Only one week later, on February 13th 1996, the CPN-M launched its armed insurgency against the government. The first series of attacks included political, military and commercial targets throughout the country.
their own taxation system and destroying records of land-ownership. Over the course of the next decade what had started in 1996 as a budding Maoist rebellion and regarded as a minor problem of law and order in a distant part of rural Nepal gradually developed into a bitter, protracted, and often brutal armed conflict that affected the entire country. The fighting was sustained from 1996 until 2006, with violations and abuses of human rights by both government Security Forces/Royal Nepal Army, (RNA) and the CPN-M widespread throughout the country; conflict-related killings were recorded in all except two of the countries 75 districts.  

The conflict escalated dramatically in 2001 after the death of King Birendra in a palace massacre by Crown Prince Dipendra in June and failed peace talks in November after unprecedented levels of violence. The conflict continued to intensify in the spring of 2002 as the Maoists kept up their attacks and issued a general strike after hundreds of people were killed in the worst massacre of the war to date. The army forces and the Maoists engaged in fierce battles in the Western parts of the country in May and the government declared a nation-wide state of emergency for the first time, simultaneously denying the insurgents’ proposal for a ceasefire. Birendra’s brother and successor, King Gyaendra deployed the army in a counter-insurgency role and dissolved the elected government. Instabilities and fighting prevailed throughout the country for the rest of the year and the government’s major steps to strengthen the army crackdown put the rebels on the defensive. The state of emergency was prolonged twice, until August 2002. This gave the police and army extended powers, leading to major restrictions of civil rights and freedom of the press in the country.  

An agreement of a ceasefire was reached between the conflict parties in January 2003, but August saw yet another escalation of violence following the collapse of the seven-month truce when the Maoists withdrew from negotiations. The rebels

473 Uppsala Conflict Data Program, UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia: Nepal; United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR Nepal Conflict Report - Executive Summary 4; Heiselberg et al., An Inclusive Peace Process in Nepal and the Role of the EU 22-24 The two districts where no killings were recorded during the conflict of 1996-2006 were Mustang and Manang of the Western region.

474 In early 2002 the government announced a large jump in military expenditure and added some 10,000 soldiers to the armed forces. The government also secured considerable amounts of foreign aid, both in the form of military hardware, training, and financial funds from England, the United States and India.

475 The independent media was strongly inhibited from reporting from the areas of turmoil.

organized another general strike and in October the government launched a massive military operation to overthrow the Maoists. In July 2004 King Gyaendra appointed a new multiparty government and requested that it restart peace negotiations and prepare to organize parliamentary elections. The conflict escalated yet again in 2005 when King Gyanendra accused politicians of ruining the country, discharged the government and seized absolute power by performing a coup d’état on the 1st of February. He promised to restore democracy by 2008, organizing municipal elections as a first step. The main political parties boycotted the polls, however, dismissing them as an attempt by the King to legitimize his rule and sideline democratic groups. Hundreds of other candidates withdrew from the elections following rebel threats to disrupt them. The royal coup and its aftermath led to yet another round of intensification of the conflict and deterioration of the overall human rights situation. The King subjected critical journalists, human rights monitors and political activists to arbitrary arrests and censorship. This was a step in the history of the conflict that provoked the disempowered political parties to join forces with the Maoists in a popular uprising in April 2006. Following weeks of (often violent) protests the monarchy was stripped of its official powers and special privileges. The King was driven from power and the negotiations between the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the CPN Maoists brought about a broad based alliance for reform. The monarch reinstated the parliament on April 24th 2006 including the historical entry into the government of the CPN-M. A Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was negotiated, and signed by the Prime Minister and Maoist leader on November 21st 2006.

The signing of the CPA was followed by the promulgation of the Interim Constitution in January 2007, the formation of the interim legislature and interim government in March-April 2007, and an announcement of Constituent Assembly (CA) elections to be held in November the same year. In September the Maoists left the interim government based on their request to abolish the monarchy. This moved the elections to the following spring. The parliament agreed to give up monarchy, which brought the Maoists back into the game. The elections were held on April 10th and the Constitutional Assembly was formed in April 2008 with the Maoists as the largest party. The 240-year-old monarchy was abolished a month later, and Nepal was declared a federal democratic republic, King Gyaendra gave up his crown and Ram Baran Yadav became Nepal’s first president. All the while at

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least 100 more persons were killed in incidents and bomb attacks in the Southern parts of the country. In 2009 the government’s decisions to combine population groups together led to protests, which prevented food and oil supplies from being transported into the mountain and hilly areas. This caused a shortage of food and oil supplies, making prices rocket and weakening food security in the country. According to the health statistics of the government approximately half of Nepali children under the age of five suffered of chronic malnutrition at this time. The country’s government found itself in a state of crisis in May 2009, which led to the resignation of Prime Minister Prachanda’s cabinet. In August 2009 the Maoists began to assert pressure again on the government and arranged demonstrations. This time they were not, however, supported by the other parties. In January 2010 the Prime Minister announced his concern about the weak progress in the peace process, in particular the delay in forming a proposal for a constitution. Overall, the continuing political instabilities and the absence of a popularly endorsed constitution and elected local government bodies hindered development and delayed implementation of the CPA.478

The decade long conflict in Nepal between Maoist insurgents and government security forces took a heavy toll on the civilian population: some 13,000479 people were killed. According to various estimates some 200,000 people have been internally displaced by the conflict, and up to two million people are further believed to have fled the violence by migrating to India and beyond.480 Meanwhile, the overall implications of Nepal's situation to its population have been gruesome. Nepalis living outside the capital, Kathmandu, are said to have remained hostage to a climate of impunity. They have been caught between local Maoist commanders and a security regime that has often operated beyond the confines of the law. Civilians have been exposed to abuses by both sides of the conflict. The Maoists have killed, intimidated or coerced local government officials. They have harassed civilians suspected of having government sympathies and abducted children into their indoctrination programs. They have also extorted money from and restricted

479 Estimates on the amount of casualties vary between different sources. According to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the official count of Nepalis killed as of May 2006 was 13,246.
freedom of movement of civilians. These actions have had implications for agriculture, food security and market access. The record of the government controlled armed forces and police does not look any better with evidence of arbitrary arrests, detentions, torture disappearances and summary executions. The Nepali army has been singled out for particular criticism by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. Nepal has also had the highest number of disappearances reported to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in the years running up to 2006. Immediately after the signing of the peace agreement, aid officials in Nepal were concerned that local conditions could quickly deteriorate to warrant greater assistance, although the situation no longer was described as a humanitarian crisis. With the extreme vulnerability and poverty of the local communities of remote areas the risk of them being pushed over from a tolerable, manageable situation into real crisis continued to be tangible.481

4.2.1 Achham district

Achham was one of nine districts where the studied intervention was launched from the very beginning of the project in early 2007. The hilly district of Achham is situated in the Seti zone of the Far Western Region, covering an area of 1,692 km². Situated approximately 930 km west of the country’s capital Katmandu, the districts of Kalikot and Dailekh are to the east of Achham, Doti to the west, Bajura and Bajhang to the north and Surkhet of the Mid Western Region to the south. River Karnali forms the eastern and southern boundaries of Achham. Due to its remoteness the Government of Nepal has categorized Achham as belonging to a group of (9/75) districts labeled backward areas. It has also been ranked as one of the three least developed districts of the country in terms of infrastructural and socio-economic development indicators482. At the time of this research and most of the duration of the studied project (2006-2010) this district was joined with Dhangadhi (location of project’s support unit) by a paved road only up to Sanphebagar483, which was 259 km long.484 Neither of the district’s two airports

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483 Various sources use different spelling for Sanphebagar. It is also spelled as Sanfebagar, and is also referred to as Sanfe or Sanphe.
has been in operation since the conflict. The Sanphe airport was destroyed during the conflict in 2002.

Achham’s population numbered 257,477 in 2011. 54% of the district’s population was female, with a literacy rate of 37%. The situation of women in Achham is especially dire, and well below the national average as measured by various gender and social inclusion indicators. An example of this is the fact that an estimated 96% of women are prohibited from participating in regular household activities and made to live in small huts or shelters known as the *chhaupadi* during menstruation. The chhaupadi system is a specific cultural practice prevalent among Hindu caste groups that perceive women to be impure during menstruation.\(^{485}\) The vast majority of Achhamese are Hindu (99%) and 0.3% are Buddhist. The main occupation of the majority of the population (60%) was agriculture, while 5% of households in the district were landless. According to the 2001 census over half of Achhamese were Chhetri (57%), a quarter were Dalits (26%), while Brahmins and Janjatis accounted for 11% and 1% of the population respectively.\(^{486}\)

Overall, Achham was heavily affected by the armed conflict, and has generally been considered as one of its hotspots.\(^{487}\) A total of 330 persons lost their lives in Achham, 419 were internally displaced and countless more were wounded and traumatized. A large part of the district’s critical infrastructure suffered significant damage. For example in February 2002 a single day attack in the district headquarters Mangalsen and Sanphe killed over 150 policemen, government officials and security force personnel as well as a number of Maoist combatants. Most government buildings were also destroyed.\(^{488}\)

\(^{484}\) Recently the road between Sanphe and the district headquarter Mangalsen has been paved. See UN Achham district profile 2013.


\(^{486}\) OHCHR Nepal Conflict Report, 1-2.


\(^{488}\) OHCHR Nepal Conflict Report, 2.
Figure 15. Map of Achham district\(^\text{489}\)

There are 75 VDCs in Achham district. Five of them were selected as implementation areas for various water resource-related schemes under the RVWRMP project. Among those, Bhatakatiya and Dhungachalna were selected by the District Development Committee as so-called first batch VDCs of the project. Bhatakatiya is the VDC that I visited in order to gain a local perspective of the intervention during my data collection trip to Nepal in February – April 2008. Bhatakatiya VDC is a remote village settlement of Achham district without any

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490 Map credit: RVWRMP project.
connection to road networks. At the time of my visit there it took about a 14-15 hours walk from the district headquarters to reach the VDC. The remoteness and lack of road connections had resulted in considerable hardships to the local people of Bhatakatiya in terms of access to rural markets as well as local institutions providing public services. The number of schools, health posts and other public utilities was extremely limited, and the facilities that did exist in the area seemed to me to be largely bare walls. The total population of Bhatakatiya VDC at the time of the beginning of the project was 4676 persons clustered in 805 households. The male to female ratio of the population was almost 1:1 with 2350 male and 2326 female community members. The average family size in the VDC was 5.8. The baseline survey conducted for the project had found that despite subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry being practiced in all sub-committees of the VDC the production was not sufficient to meet food requirements throughout the year. Up to 69% of households were unable to meet food requirements for more than three months annually. The conflict, either through the hands and actions of the Nepali army forces or of the Maoists, or both had directly affected over 90% of Bhatakatiyans. Further, the education level in the VDC was dismal, with an estimated 40% of the population being illiterate.

A main committee responsible for the VDC’s water resources management was formed through consensus decision-making on 28th May 2007 in the framework of the project. It was formed from representatives of the local communities, and consisted of 22 members, comprising 14 male and eight female members, including three male and one female Dalit persons. The main committee was formed, after the formation of the sub-committees through a process of social and technical assessment at local level. In addition to this there were savings groups in each of

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491 Personal communication at PSU 1.3.2008; research journal 16.3.2008.
493 Water Use Master Plan, Bhatakatiya VDC, (Volume I) Final Main Report, April 2008 Water Resources Management Committee Bhatakatiya, Achham. Sharma’s primary data collection found a few years later still that only one percent of the households in Bhatakatiya were able to maintain food sufficiency for over a year. See Sharma, (2012) 28.
494 Ibid. Sharma’s primary data collection found that around one third of the people of Bhatakatiya had finished primary level education, 9% had completed lower secondary level, four percent had passed the so-called SLC level (School Leaving Certificate), under 3 percent had completed intermediate level education and only 0.2% a bachelors level education.
495 Water Use Master Plan, Bhatakatiya VDC, (Volume I) Final Main Report, April 2008 Water Resources Management Committee Bhatakatiya, Achham. For closer local level planning of the project, Bhatakatiya was divided into seven sub-committees in order to prepare the planned water use master plan of the VDC. See map of Bhatakatiya above.
the wards of Bhatakatiya, separately for men and women. Savings groups had been established by “the Lutherans” in the late 1990s, but they had not been functional during the conflict. The groups had been revived through the RVWRMP project (or “RV-/ Finnida -project” as it was commonly referred to by locals) and met on a regular basis to save money. The project had also mobilized locals to work together in various groups and user committees for sanitation, drinking water, electricity and community organization. The working of these groups had made locals more aware of health and sanitation issues as well as gender equality and the importance of social inclusion. The community members of Bhatakatiya joined the working of the groups by contributing cash and labor across ethnic and caste divides, political ideologies, and economic strata.496

“During the conflict you would have killed me”

Throughout the dataset of this study, both in the project’s documentation as well as in interview data, the dominant story emerging about the situation in conflict-affected Bhatakatiya VDC was that things were much better now after the ending of the conflict: that the situation was calm and peaceful, and that this was reflected also in the project’s work. In addition to a confusing and incoherent story told by locals of Bhatakatiya of the delays of project work in Patakani, there were a number of instances during my stay in Bhatakatiya when I found ruptures in this narrative. These made it quite clear to me that underneath the seemingly calm surface the experience of the past violent conflict was still tangible and aching. An example of this was when one evening as we were sitting and talking by the fire in the kitchen of Sher Bahadur’s497 house after our evening meal we heard a man’s voice shouting from one of the houses down the hill:

Long live the Maoists! We are the Maoists; nobody can do anything to us! I am the Maobadi from Bhatakatiya! You can kill me if you dare!

Kalawati498: Heh Bhagwan!! [Oh my god!] 499

496 Research journal 16.3. 2008; and observations from interviews with locals, March 2008.
497 Sher Bahadur Shah is the name of a local teacher from Purna Chandra Secondary school, whose house we lived in during our stay in Bhatakatiya.
498 Kalawati Chaudhery acted as my local guide, room mate and support person during my stay in Bhatakatiya. She was working for the project as health promoter, and employed by the support organization PRSDC.
The next evening Sher Bahadur told us that now-a-days relations between supporters of Maoists and the government are so good that they are able to make fun about the war. “During the conflict you would have killed me! – I wouldn’t have just killed you, I would have eaten you too!” they joke with one another, he said. In subtle ways I started to realize there were more shades of grey to the story than first met the eye. Just as Sher Bahadur had been telling this story about the joking, we heard shouting, screaming and crying from the houses down the hill again. It sounded like women and children crying and screaming. I thought that maybe someone had been injured. One of the men also staying in Sher Bahadur’s house went outside and found out that the same “Maobadi from Bhatakatiya” from the night before had gotten into a fight with his cousin. The Maoist wanted his cousin to vote for the Maobadis in the coming elections, but the cousin supported Congress and wanted to keep his way. The quarrel about politics between the cousins had escalated into a violent physical fight.500

Another time that I clearly sensed the underlying tensions within the community in Bhatakatiya was when talking with a 59 year old local Brahman man. He had come to the village to conduct a religious ritual for a 10-day-old baby. He compared life in his youth to what it was like now, how people used not to have any salt, clothes or slippers, and now these could all be bought here and everyone wears shoes. He told us about the lack of education in the area and how everyone used to be illiterate. “Only some people used to read in their home,” he said, but now that there were schools here people were getting educated. He explained that foreign donors were starting to come to the area too, making roads and bringing water taps. He then spoke about times before and after the conflict:

Life was the same [before the conflict]. But during the conflict some lost their child. Some young and old people lost their lives. Peace was not here. Sometimes people were upset… During the conflict nobody could speak against the yo-yos [Maoists]… but now it’s peaceful.

But there was good leadership [before the conflict]. If the leader said one thing, everyone followed it – that’s why [we] had unity. But after the conflict it is not so because now there are different kinds of views and ideologies. [And now] if we say something, it threatens them… the people with other

500 Research journal 17.3.2008.
...ideologies... If some people say: “this would be good,” then people from an other ideology oppose it...

He explained that his wish for the future of the community consisted of brotherhood, good coordination, welfare, mutual guidance, and cooperation. When I asked him how all of this could be achieved, the man seemed to be agitated. He had been leaning back, propped against his elbows on the ground, but suddenly he sat up straight and exclaimed:

Through the good will of people! – But some have bad feelings. Nobody has good feelings. Everyone feels bad! In the community we should feel that everyone is each other’s mother and father. But we don’t have this always. There are also bad people in the society. Some people think that their parents are only their parents. This creates disharmony within the community. Everyone in the society is not good. They have bad feelings too, for example while walking, if one person always wants to be the one walking ahead, that creates bad feelings. Some want to go faster in the development, some want to be closer to the leader.

I asked the man how things were worked out in the community if there were differences of opinion. He explained that it is more difficult to handle differences in the family since there may often be two or three different ideologies within one family. But regarding the community’s development, the man declared, there is more unanimity, despite differing ideologies:

Society is for all; … you see this forest, this community forest? …Every member of the community lives together and everyone is responsible for the community. And [we] take …responsibility for the community development together [like trees in the forest].

Me: That’s surprising! In my country there’s often a lot of debate and discussion before we get to unanimous decisions [among different ideologies]…

Local man: … [But] yes, [we] have unity. When the development program comes, [we] all unite and do the program [together] for development. For development [we] don’t have diversity of ideologies…

…[just as] in family ceremonies… like marriage and other ceremonies, … all the ideologies gather together.
The conflict background of Bhatakatiya was distinctly out in the open during almost all of my encounters with the locals. An example of this was a discussion I had with a fairly large group of women whom we met in the Rolte community of Bhatakatiya:

Me: I am here to study. ... I heard that there’s a Finnish funded development project in this area. And this area has also suffered of violence and conflict. I’m interested in how a development project can ... help you – the local people to build a good and happy life, and a peaceful society. I have been talking to men and women and children, and I’m hearing interesting and nice stories about your life – but also [about] your past during the conflict. It makes me very sad.

Women of Rolte: Mm, mm – dika, dika. Yes, it’s very sad [for] us.

Me: Can you tell me more? What has been the most difficult thing about the past conflict?

(Lively discussion flares up amongst the women, several persons start to talk and comment, to answer my question in the form of a conversation amongst themselves.)

Bimala translates to me that the women responded by telling about how the Nepalese army came here, how the plane [helicopter] had landed right in the area near to where we were sitting. The army soldiers had beaten all of the people and raped women. This area, they said, had suffered most from the violence during the conflict because it was up on top of the hills where the army helicopters would land. All members of the community had been affected and injured by the conflict, and one person from this village had died. “Even though he was innocent...his dead body was lying here for four days. Nobody dared to go there to get him,” they said. People had fled their homes and gone hiding into the forest for up to 10 days. People hid in different places and family members were separated. One of the women had just given birth to a baby and she also had had to go and hide in the forest with her newborn. They had to leave their cattle behind when they fled to the forest – so the animals sometimes died too without food and water. The women told us that the Nepali army soldiers had destroyed the local shop, taken whatever jewelry, gold, silver and ornaments they could find and taken the locals’

502 Similar sentiments and stories as the one told below were expressed particularly in my discussions with the communities in Parivan and Naitola as well as with a group of female health workers.
food, chickens, ghee and utensils. “I still remember my bracelet that they took” one of the women said sadly, showing her wrist.

Bimala: Though you have not asked the question, they are explaining; …during the war period they could not live together. They also got gunfire from the planes too. Sometimes they also blast bombs from the airplane too, and there was no water. So it was difficult to get even water.

Me: So was it mainly from the army’s side that you suffered in this area?

Rolte women: Yes. The army beat all people of this community. Men and women.

(Conversation continues among the women)

Bimala translates bits and pieces of the ongoing conversation. One of the women speaking said that once seven army soldiers surrounded her, pointing their guns at her. They had said: “we will kill you, old woman!” She had replied to them: “Okay, if you want to kill me, then kill me.” She had then been so terrified that she had just closed her eyes – and – the soldiers had stepped back. Gone away.

Me: How can you overcome something like this? It’s beyond me… it must – does come into your dreams?

(Again a vibrant conversation starts up again amongst the women.)

The women talk about the upcoming elections and how their experience of the conflict has affected their faith in the elections and possibility to participate in following the campaigning:

We have big fear of soldiers; we couldn’t go to the election campaigning because there were soldiers there. That’s why we didn’t go in the public – there was the CPN/UML program [election campaigning at the main market square in Bhatakatiya a few days earlier]. We didn’t go there because we saw the army there. The soldiers. We were afraid. The fear [still] lives inside us.
Figure 17. Map of field research area in Bhatakatiya VDC

4.3 Finnish-Nepali bilateral development cooperation: the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project

Development cooperation is one way in which Finnish development policy is implemented. This involves practical cooperation with developing countries and other cooperation partners such as international organizations and NGOs. According to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, bilateral development cooperation is based on the partner countries’ own development plans and
dialogue conducted with them. The responsibility for “effecting change lies with the partner countries themselves,” and is merely supported by Finland. Finland focuses on long-term partnerships with developing countries based on the recognition that achieving lasting development impact takes several years. Partnerships with developing countries are described as being based on need for support, with an emphasis on the least developed countries (LDCs) in Africa and Asia. Most of Finland’s partner countries are characterized as “fragile.” Further, Finland has chosen to support countries that are “committed to achieving development goals and can benefit from Finnish know-how.”

Nepal is one of Finland's long-term bilateral partners in development. Preceded by missionary work (e.g. by the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission), official cooperation between Finland and Nepal started in 1983, continuing also throughout the armed conflict of 1996-2006. Finnish-Nepali cooperation has covered projects in a wide range of sectors, primary among which have been education and natural resources (including water and sanitation, forestry and environment). Finland has also contributed to aid programs supporting democratic development, human rights and the peace process in Nepal. According to the concentration policy of Finland's development cooperation in 2004 rural water

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505 In addition to Nepal Finland currently has six other long-term partner countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Vietnam) and five other partner countries, most characterized as “fragile.” At the time of the implementation of the case study project of this research Nicaragua was additionally among the long-term partner countries for Finnish development cooperation. See [www.formin.finland.fi](http://www.formin.finland.fi).

506 Finland is said to have used all available instruments in the development cooperation toolbox in its cooperation with Nepal except budget support. In addition to bilateral cooperation, Finland has funded aid initiatives through the Fund for Local Cooperation. A majority of the Local Cooperation Funds has been channeled to micro projects run by local NGOs to promote democracy, human rights and good governance. The Finnish Embassy in Kathmandu also has upheld preparedness to support initiatives aimed at peaceful conflict resolution as well as restoration of democracy. Finally, Finnish development cooperation in Nepal includes the work carried out by several Finnish NGOS in cooperation with their local partners. See Embassy of Finland Kathmandu website (accessed 3.10.2006 and 1.6.2007). See also Guidelines for cooperation between Nepal and Finland 21.6.2006, HEL5051-25 For a more comprehensive overview of the history of Finnish-Nepali cooperation as well as the country program between Finland and Nepal, see Julian Caldecott et al., *Evaluation: The Country Programme between Finland and Nepal* (Helsinki: Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2012).

507 Development Policy, Government Resolution 28.
supply and education were selected as two main sectors of bilateral development cooperation between Finland and Nepal. In 2008 Finnish bilateral project and program specific aid to Nepal amounted to 8.62 million euros.\textsuperscript{508}

Caldecott et al. describe the country program between Finland and Nepal since the late 1990s as having two phases. The first phase, they claim, was “brought to an end by the declaration of martial law and the King’s usurpation of power in 2005, and the climax, resolution and immediate aftermath of the civil war…” During this period the European Union, Finland and other EU Member States suspended formal country consultations and programming. The second phase started with planning for bilateral consultations in 2007 that began immediately after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. These consultations were informed on the Finnish side by the 2007 development policy, which directed dialogue between the two countries towards environmentally sustainable development, thus bringing the water, forestry and climate change sectors to the fore.\textsuperscript{509} The timeline of the chosen case intervention of this study is situated in between these two phases described by Caldecott et al.

The institutional background of the studied project in Nepal is linked to the Nepal Rural Water and Sanitation Services Sector Strategy and its Action Plan dating to 2003. The purpose of this strategy was to guide the Nepalese government, donor agencies, NGOs and the private sector to prioritize investment decisions following a commonly agreed approach. The implementation of the strategy was, however, unsuccessful, leaving the water, sanitation and hygiene sector (WASH) largely uncoordinated. Sectorial activities have been split among competing ministries, banks, bilateral projects and NGOs, each with their own modalities as well as funding mechanisms and sources. The Ministry of Physical Planning and Works (MPPW) has formally had the lead role in the sector, but the Ministry for Local Development has also had a large number of rural water and sanitation projects. Planning for the WASH sector is founded on a so-called Three Year Interim Plan, with the government in lead, albeit charged of ineffectiveness and scarce information sharing. According to the evaluation of the country program between Finland and Nepal the bilateral Finnish WASH sector project have contributed positively to improving the situation in this regard.\textsuperscript{510}

\textsuperscript{508} Suomen kehitysyhteistyö 08 (Helsinki: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2009).
\textsuperscript{509} Caldecott et al., Evaluation: The Country Programme between Finland and Nepal 44-45.
\textsuperscript{510} Ibid. 61-62.
The beginnings of Finnish assistance to Nepal in the water and sanitation sector date to 1988 when the government of Nepal requested a mission to formulate a long-term cooperation program focused on drinking water. This resulted in the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project (RWSSP), which ran for 15 years in three consecutive phases. While Phase I (1990-1996) achieved an impressive extension of water coverage using contractors to construct wells, Phases II and III (1996-1999 and 1999-2005) had greater user participation and achieved more community mobilization, local ownership and the building of local capacity to plan and manage the schemes. According to Sharma, already after the Phase II the project was regarded among the Finns as one of the most successful Finnish water projects anywhere with resource mobilization, capacity building, and participatory and gender-sensitive approaches as its main strategies. Also the Nepalese government, as well as other donors and stakeholders noted the success of the project, and its continuation and replication was warmly recommended. The grounding of the RWSSP project in community participation was seen as an important factor in its success, with the most significant features being a step-by-step approach; supportive government decentralization policies; promotion of financial self-sufficiency; integration of health and education issues with water and sanitation; incorporation of women as active participants; the use of diversified strategies to allow adaptation to local conditions; and active targeting of disadvantaged castes and ethnic groups.

The case study intervention (Rural Village Water Resources Management Project, Phase I, 2006-2010) of this dissertation was founded largely on the example set by the RWSSP project described above. The project focused on some of the poorest and most remote areas of Nepal, ten hilly and mountainous districts in the Mid and Far Western development regions, with a total population of some

511 Phase I of the RWSSP resulted in 110 drinking water and sanitation schemes in six districts of the Lumbini Zone of Western Nepal, serving an estimated 237,000 people in 54 VDCs.

512 Phase II resulted in water supply schemes for over 100,000 people, with 68 gravity flow schemes for some 39,000 people, 27 shallow tube wells and dug wells for more than 50,000 people, and 18 rainwater schemes for nearly 13,000 people along with sanitation facilities for more than 18,000. Phase III incorporated many of the same features in six or more district-based projects and improved water supplies for an estimated 216,000 people and sanitation for about 52,000.


514 Cladecott et al. (2012) 63-63.
1.5 million (see maps of all project areas annex 4). The emphasis on decentralization and the key role of locally elected VDCs and DDCs was a reflection of the Local Self-Governance Act of 1999 that lie at the background of the intervention. The operational setting of the project was in an area with strong Maoist influence and ranked either “poor” or “very poor” in the UN Human Development Indexation (HDI) system. Referring to Hachhethu, Caldecott et al. describe the overall position of some of the project districts as “pathetic.” These parts of the country, chosen as the operational area of the project, are not only remote in physical distance, but also better connected by road access to the Indian cities of Lucknow and Delhi than to Kathmandu. Several of the project districts were (and still are) reachable only after several days of walking from road ends. Thus delivery of development services has been minimal. Moreover, corruption, as well as caste and gender-based discrimination is pervasive. The government is barely present in the most remote village development committees (VDCs), with schools having no teachers, VDC secretaries living in district headquarters and health posts without medical supplies (and knowledge). Water-borne diseases and malnutrition is common, especially among children. Girls are often denied education and married off as children, while women are generally denied the right to participate in communal decision-making and development processes, and subject to the chhaupadi system of being barred from their homes during menstruation. The out-migration of men to India for work is also common in these regions, resulting only in meager savings and often sexually transmitted diseases.

The challenges of development work in the area has been illustrated by the withdrawal of funding to community drinking water projects in the Far Western region by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in March 2011 due to slow progress and lack of transparency.515

The overall objective toward which the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project (RVWRMP) aimed to contribute was improved quality of life, environmental conditions and increased opportunities to improve rural livelihoods. This was to be achieved through rational, equitable and sustainable use of water at the village level. Comprehensive water use master plans would be developed toward this end, while institutional capacity for water use management was to be

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improved. Environment was treated as a crosscutting issue, and the role of women and equal representation of both genders was emphasized. The overall approach of the intervention was defined as being holistic, bottom-up, participatory, income generative, coordinated, and aiming for multiple use of water. The overall budget of the project for the entire four years was EUR 15,8 million.

The primary stakeholders of the project included the Finnish and Nepali governments and their representatives respectively at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Helsinki/Embassy of Finland in Kathmandu and Ministry for Local Development/Department of Local Infrastructure Development and Agricultural Roads in Kathmandu, the Steering Committee of the project in Nepal, the implementing agency (Finnish Consulting Group, FCG) and its representatives in both Finland and Nepal, staff members at the project support unit (PSU) in Dhangadhi, project employees in the operational areas (districts), representatives of the district development committees (DDCs), local NGOs and their staff hired as support organizations of project implementation in the districts, and finally the local people in the selected project village development committees (VDCs) as members of the user committees and end beneficiaries of the intervention. (See annex 1 for the full organization chart of the intervention without the VDC level/beneficiaries.)

The execution of the chosen case study project of this research, Phase I of the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project (RVWRMP), was organized in the project documentation by a so-called scheme cycle. The scheme cycle refers to the local implementation of the project in any one specific community area within the village development committees. A complete cycle of each individual infrastructural development scheme was divided into four phases. The phases are called the planning phase, preparatory phase, implementation phase and post construction phase. In this dissertation when referring to the various stages of the project as a whole I use the term design and preparations phase to denote the time of planning and preparing for the intervention (before the signing of the bilateral agreement in 2006); implementation for the time after the signing of the contract and

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516 Ibid.
517 The initial budget of the project was EUR 13,7 million but based on the recommendation of the Mid-term review in 2009 the Steering Committee added a further EUR 2,0 million to the project budget. The total overall budget thus rose to EUR 15,8 million. The district development committees VDCs each contributed 0,9% of the total budget toward the project. The local community members and users also contributed 0,5% in cash (0,5 percent) and 8,1% as in kind contribution to the project. See RVWRMP Project Completion Report, 2010.
when project activities were being carried out; and completion phase to denote (approximately) the final year of the project when advances and progress were being evaluated and the next phase being planned for. The following three chapters, consisting of the chronological narrative of the project as viewed through this research are titled accordingly.
5 Design and Preparations for the Project

The identification of the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project took place in late 2001, almost five years before its commencement. Following an active and successful history of Finnish involvement in the water and sanitation sector in Nepal since the early 1990s, the Ministry of Local Development (MLD) of His Majesty’s Government of Nepal (HMGN) made a request for extended Finnish support. The HMGN proposal was for “Coordinated Implementation of Rural Water Resources in Participatory Approach,” involving coordination of the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Support Programme (RWSSP) and the Rural Energy Development Programme (REDP), a joint program of the HMGN and United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

HMGN sees that as both programmes, RWSSP and REDP, are successfully operating in their respective areas, it is envisaged that such successful programmes focusing in the areas of energy, irrigation drinking water and sanitation should be coordinated to produce synergy for the benefits of rural people leading to the poverty alleviation in the hills and mountain districts of the country. The community participatory approach based on the community mobilization will be adopted in line with the Local Self-Governance Act 1999. The implementation mechanism will follow the existing modalities with some modification, if needed, through the formation of functional group/users groups with the active participation of DDC and VDC based on transparency and consensus decision making process… In the proposed coordinated implementation of the programme the responsibility of Finland would be water supply, sanitation activities and community based irrigation system.


519 Terms of Reference, 8.11.2001. UM 93.20 NEP, Nepal: Maaseudun vesi- ja sanitaatiobanke (Helsinki: Ministry for Foreign Affairs; Asia and Oceania, 2001).

520 Terms of Reference, 8.11.2001. UM 93.20 NEP.
The project identification mission that followed in late 2001, was mandated to “draw experience from the previous phases of different projects, especially from development of rural water supply, irrigation, energy and education in other parts of Nepal, and take into account the general and sector policies of HMGN.” The prescription of the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the identification mission was that the project outline be based on the continuation and further evolution of a decentralized demand-driven approach, with emphasis on the major responsibility of the VDCs (Village Development Committees) and DDCs (District Development Committees). Further, there was a request that the project outline should be consistent with national policies and strategies as well as with strategic goals and policies of Finnish Development cooperation. Finally, the initial assumption was that the proposed intervention would aim at expanding the physical outputs through facilitating, not implementing, and that simultaneously the tasks carried out by the envisaged project organization should be increasingly “taken over by the client, and direct client-supplier relationships should be enhanced in the implementation.” The preparation of the identification mission was to follow the logical framework and integrated approach of the MFA, as described in its Guidelines for Programme Design, Monitoring and Evaluation.

5.1 Political instabilities affect project planning

The initial planning for the project was conducted mainly as a desk study due to the deteriorating security situation in Western Nepal, which had prevented visits to the field. The first time that the instability of the intended project context was pinpointed in the history of the project, was in response to the request spelled out by the MFA in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the project identification mission about mapping out possible risks related to the proposed project. Here the possible political instabilities in the project area were foreseen as “causing delays and other problems to the project during its implementation.”

Further work recommended by the consultant for project preparation included conducting a detailed study on the characteristics of the proposed project area

521 Terms of Reference, 8.11.2001. UM 93.20 NEP. My italics.
(“geography, demography, socio-cultural and gender aspects, service coverage etc.”); carrying out a problem analysis and defining detailed project objectives, results and indicators; performing a study on irrigation policies and strategies to be applied; identifying partners for financing the project as well as negotiating cost-sharing; harmonizing procedures with other actors in the intended project sector; and establishing a detailed administration and management structure and fund flow mechanisms.\textsuperscript{524} No specific recommendations were made, however, with regard to arriving at a fuller understanding of the politically unstable environment, despite the reporting of a first hand experience of such instability during the project identification mission:

Visit on site was not possible due to the state of emergency declared by the Government of Nepal last week as a result of political unrest in various parts of the country.\textsuperscript{525}

An Outline Project Document\textsuperscript{526} was drawn up in January 2002 by the consultant Jukka Piekkari, who had carried out the project identification mission at the turn of November-December 2001. This document was later updated – with only minor alterations – in 2006 in connection with the commencement of the project. The foundations of the case study project were strongly laid on experience gathered from other ongoing and successful water projects in Nepal, funded by UNDP (the REDP), the Government of Finland (RWSSSP\textsuperscript{527}), the Swiss Association for International Development Cooperation – Helvetas (through the Water Resource Management Project, WARM-P), and the International Development Association IDA (with the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Fund Development Board, RWSSFDB). In the process of defining the problems to be assessed, a problem statement from the Helvetas WARM Programme was adopted as a proxy for future problem analysis of the case study project (RVWRMP). The problem statement was clearly descriptive of the challenges related to the development of

\textsuperscript{524} Mission Report, 31.1.2002, UM 93.20 NEP.

\textsuperscript{525} Mission Report, 31.1.2002, UM 93.20 NEP.


\textsuperscript{527} The acronym for the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme varies in different documents, either RWSSP or RWSSSP (Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Programme). I use both, depending on the version being used in each document referred to.
rural water resources in Nepal, including source disputes and reluctance of sharing being among the factors behind unequal, unrealistic and unsustainable water use:

Water is not used in a realistic, equitable, scientific and sustainable way as a result of source disputes, lack of awareness on existing legislation, tendency to hide the nearer sources, wanting more than what is really required, and expressing reluctance to share by individuals of groups…

5.1.1 Root causes of conflict emphasized as the basis of development cooperation

In April 2003, during Finnish-Nepalese country consultations, the Nepalese delegation noted that Nepal had been passing through “a very difficult situation particularly over last couple of years.” The evaluation of the foregone Ninth Development Plan had shown that past development efforts had failed to meet the goal of poverty reduction, particularly in rural areas, and that poverty had been widespread and deepest among women, ethnic groups and people living in remote areas. In terms of the “law and order situation” circumstances were portrayed as having been considerably improved, in particular after the new government had taken initiative “to settle the Maoist problem.” A ceasefire had been declared on the 29th of January 2003 and a code of conduct had been made public. Mr. Bhanu Prasad Acharya of the Ministry of Finance and Leader of the Nepalese delegation of the consultations expected that “ever lasting peace would prevail soon in Nepal.” The Nepalese delegation described the government’s ongoing process of planning and implementing rehabilitation and reconstruction of basic infrastructures simultaneously with launching of new pro-poor development activities. These efforts were, however, not seen as being sufficient alone, and development partners’ cooperation was welcomed as “extremely important [in order] to rehabilitate and reconstruct the destroyed infrastructures.”

Expressing the Finnish delegation’s happiness to visit Nepal…

…at a time when…all the Nepalese people hopefully can put behind the period of armed conflict and concentrate in endeavours to achieve lasting

peace and with the peace, re-institut[e] the principles of multiparty democracy with elections leading to democratic governance, [and] respect and promotion of rule of law and human rights

...the Leader of the Finnish delegation, Ms. Päivi Luostarinen of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs stressed the importance of reforms and development efforts in addressing the underlying causes of the conflict. Underlining the role of development cooperation as a significant part of Finnish foreign policy, Ms. Luostarinen had explained how “Finland’s relations with developing countries are considered as comprehensively as possible, aiming at coherent goals in foreign and security policy, trade policy and development cooperation.” The Finnish delegation further drew attention to Finland’s criteria and prerequisites set for long-term partner countries in development cooperation, based on which Finland would be “closely following the situation in Nepal... although understanding the present situation to be of temporary nature.” Ms. Luostarinen had further explained that Finland would be paying attention in particular “…to the [Nepalese] Government’s commitment to democratic principles, commitment to improving the human rights situation and effective implementation of reforms...promoting good governance and abolishment of corruption and development programmes…” – reminding simultaneously of Finland’s preparedness to contribute to these efforts. The Finnish delegation had further explained Finland’s emphasis in bilateral cooperation as being on participating in programs addressing the problems that had lead to the recent conflict. On this basis poverty alleviation was identified as the main objective of Finnish support, while acknowledging the need to implement rural programs “in regions so far mostly rejected” as well as the need to pay special attention to issues concerning gender and social exclusion.530

5.1.2 Instability seen as both risk and opportunity

The Finnish Embassy in Kathmandu spoke strongly in favor of starting up the project as soon as possible, depending, however, “on the development of the political situation in the country.” Attempting to take into consideration the “difficult situation in Nepal” in the preparations of the project, the goal was defined by Charge d ‘Affairs a.i. Mr. Asko Luukkainen as leading a process that

530 Minutes of Consultations on Cooperation between Finland and Nepal, 11.4.2003.
would begin with the overall plans for water use and end with satisfied people who have access to water and sanitation services. The choice of the project location in the western areas of Nepal was described in a Cover Note by Mr. Luuukkainen as being based on the region’s poverty, the unrest caused by that poverty, as well as the development aspirations defined by Nepal.\textsuperscript{531} The point concerning the unrest caused by poverty was an abrupt turn away from the Outline Document, which had previously specified in a list of reasons for selecting the particular area of operation the fact that the political situation in the intended project districts appeared to be “less unstable than in the central and eastern parts of the country”\textsuperscript{532}. Either way, by this time, the instability in Nepal had constituted a real challenge to the continuation of project planning and postponed its intended kick-off by almost two years.

During the consultations on cooperation between Nepal and Finland, it had been agreed with the Nepali Ministry for Local Development (MLD) that their comments would be integrated into the project identification report and that the project preparations would continue. Thus, “circumstances allowing,” and “keeping an eye on the political developments” project planning was continued. The decision to locate the future project in the most remote and poorest areas of Nepal was confirmed, and the main risk identified for the project was reiterated as that “related to the political situation in Nepal.”\textsuperscript{533}

The proposed project location was a stronghold area of the Maoist movement. There was no democracy in the country at the time. A government appointed by the King ruled the country; the parliament had been dismantled and no local elections had been held.\textit{Despite this challenging political situation, the Embassy of Finland in Kathmandu advocated strongly in support of continuing with project planning.}

Donors need to plan new projects for the future. It is possible; after all, that at some point the government in the country and the Maoist movement will agree on a ceasefire and in the best case on a peace agreement. In the case

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that such an agreement should emerge, it is the aid providers with project plans prepared, who will be able to implement them without delay.\textsuperscript{534} The instability and ongoing conflict was, however, portrayed by the Embassy primarily as a hindrance to starting up the project. Yet, on just this one occasion in the design phase documentation, the project was explicitly described as being linked also to conflict prevention:

The root cause of the conflict is precisely the fact that the remote areas have been forgotten. It is thus also justifiable to call poverty alleviation conflict prevention…. [and] the RVWRM -project may be understood as a poverty alleviation project.\textsuperscript{535}

The Finnish Embassy in Kathmandu foresaw a risk of a new conflict, the escalation of which they claimed could lead to Nepal becoming a “failed state,” unless the Nepalese government would be capable of satisfying the wishes of the people in improving their living circumstances after the signing of an eventual peace agreement. There was no definition in the Embassy correspondence of what was meant by the state failing, nor were the possible effects of the realization of such a risk explained. On the other hand, the Embassy voiced a sense of optimism about the potential of “securing peace” in Nepal, which was on the one hand set as a prerequisite for starting up development activities, and on the other linking it to “the democracy situation of the country.”

If peace is secured in Nepal, new projects can be started and the funding may also be linked to the democracy situation. Arranging local and parliamentary elections could be set as a prerequisite of project realization.\textsuperscript{536}

\textbf{5.1.3 “No guarantees about security can be made”}

A project document preparation mission was carried out in late 2003 by an international consultancy team.\textsuperscript{537} In its consideration of “Political Security


\textsuperscript{535} Statement, KAT, 1.12.2003, UM 93.20 NEP, Luukkainen, Asko.

\textsuperscript{536} Statement, KAT, 1.12.2003, UM 93.20 NEP, Luukkainen, Asko.
Issues,” the mission reported as having met varying opinions and insights of how the political instability in the intended intervention area at the time would affect the project. However, the mission report stated:

…no-one was of the opinion that the situation would be completely safe for project personnel, no matter local or international. So far, currently operating aid programmes have not been targeted by the Maoists, but killings of army and policy personnel take place on [a] daily basis. For instance Government restriction to deliver metal pipes and fittings to the Mid and Far Western areas are causing some difficulties to implement existing water-aid programs.538

The project document preparation mission further reported that foreign tourists had recently been subject to extortion of money as well as robbery by Maoists, and that the risk of accidentally being caught in crossfire was real and should not be omitted. This was a point also forcefully pointed out to the mission by the UN’s National Security Officer. Moreover, during its fact-finding mission, the consultant team had itself faced curfews after dark in the Far West (in Nepalgunj and Dhangadhi) and one of the team members had been just some 100 meters from a place where three policemen had been shot to death by Maoists. Therefore the mission concluded:

[n]o guarantees about security can…be made. Prospective Finnish consultants should be made aware of the risks involved [and] the Embassy should continue to monitor closely the situation.539

5.1.4 Critical issues and strategic highlights in a challenging context

In order to realize the complex objectives of the project in what was portrayed as a fairly challenging operational context, Plancenter Ltd (subsequently Finnish Consulting Group, FCG) formed a consortium together with HCG Environment

537 The mission was carried out between Nov 1-18, 2003 by ANYCON Project Consulting Ltd., and the team consisted of 4 international team members and 3 Nepali specialists nominated by the Nepali Ministry of Local Development (MLD).

538 Mission report, 25.11.2003, UM 93.20 NEP, Nepal: Maaseudun vesi- ja sanitaatinhanke (Helsinki: ANYCON Project Consulting Ltd., 2003) 4 The dates on the cover of the report are as stated here in the reference as spanning over two years (2001-2003), however, elsewhere in the report it is clear that the mission took place entirely during November 2003.

Ltd and Helvetas Nepal for the project. Eight reference projects were presented in the Technical Tender for the case study project, which illustrated the Consortium’s strong experience in Asia, and Nepal in particular, in the water and rural development sectors.\footnote{Technical Tender for RVWRMP, June 2004, UM 93.20 NEP, Nepal: Maaseudun vesi- ja sanitaatiobanke (Helsinki: Plancenter Ltd in association with Helvetas Nepal and HCG Environment Ltd, 2004).} No mention was made of the reference projects’ experience of functioning in conflict-prone or politically unstable contexts.

Three overall “critical issues and strategic highlights” for the project were mentioned in the technical tender document: 1) Poverty reduction and livelihood development strategies, 2) strengthening decentralization, and 3) local resource mobilization. The prevailing instability of the political situation in the country was foreseen as having an effect on the latter two. First, as many of the elected political bodies (of the DDCs and VDCs) in the intended project area were dormant due to the political instability at the time of planning, it was expected that they would not necessarily be able to fully play their role in the beginning of the project. Thus the project’s plan was to emphasize strengthening District Technical Offices (DTOs) and grass-root level organizations in the villages in all activities and capacity building efforts. Secondly, local and central level resource mobilization was expected to be significantly lower in the project in comparison to preceding Finnish water sector projects in the Lumbini area. This was justified by the project’s focus on the poor and deprived communities, but was also expected due to the political situation, which had disturbed the funding capacity of HMGN, including VDC funds.\footnote{Technical Tender for RVWRMP, June 2004, 2-3.} No further elaborations were made on the effects of political instabilities on these points in the technical tender document, however.

In addition to the political instabilities of the planned project area, the consortium made note of the fact that remote districts of Nepal rarely have reliable and continual data concerning the quality and quantity of water resources. Conflicts over the right to use water for different purposes and among different social groups had also grown in number over past years as pressure on water and land resources had increased. For this reason, effective and efficient use of water and an equitable allocation of water-use rights were perceived as major challenges in the area. Consequently, the consortium recommended developing a holistic approach\footnote{The holistic approach was defined in the Project Document Preparation Mission Report (25.11.2003, UM 93.20 NEP, Nykänen, Antti) as an “…approach integrating all sub-sectors of water (drinking water, sanitation, irrigation and electricity) as well as activities directly linked with water} for the project, supported by community education.\footnote{The holistic approach was defined in the Project Document Preparation Mission Report (25.11.2003, UM 93.20 NEP, Nykänen, Antti) as an “…approach integrating all sub-sectors of water (drinking water, sanitation, irrigation and electricity) as well as activities directly linked with water}
5.2 A shift in argumentation concerning choice of operational area – contextual instability calls for special considerations

The education and water sectors had been confirmed as the main sectors of cooperation during the Finnish-Nepali bilateral country negotiations of 2003. Finnish support in these two sectors was seen as strengthening the institutions of local administration and raising the standard of living in remote areas of Nepal. In this way, Finnish support was portrayed as tackling poverty and inequality, the root causes of the Maoist conflict. The meaning of Finnish bilateral support in aid-dependent Nepal was, moreover, portrayed as ever greater in a situation in which tourism, investments and export was suffering of the effects of the conflict and leaving economic growth meager. It was at this juncture that there was a shift in the argumentation within the project documentation regarding the choice of the planned operational area of the project. The “political situation in the planned project districts” portrayed as “unstable at the moment” was now given as one of the main reasons for selecting that particular operational area. As described above, the point regarding instability in the country had been present already in the Outline Project Document in 2002, in a respective list of reasons for selecting the particular area of operation. Only in the Outline Document the reasoning had been that the political situation in the intended project districts appeared to be “less unstable” than in the central and eastern parts of the country.” Neither one of the versions of the project document (2002 and 2004) included any elaboration of whether or not, nor how the instability of the context would possibly affect further planning and implementation.

Overall, the intended operational and institutional context in Nepal changed dramatically during the initial design phase of the project. The armed Maoist insurgency developed into

resources development (environmental conservation, agricultural production, income generation etc.) in planning, implementation and O&M [operation and maintenance] of the selected schemes.”

543 Technical Tender for RVWRMP, June 2004, 3.
544 Minutes of Consultations on Cooperation between Finland and Nepal, 11.4.2003, UM 93.10 Nepal-Suomi, kehitysyhteistyö yleensä
548 Emphasis added.
a full military conflict with the state security forces, increasing insecurity and deepening poverty especially in the rural areas. The proposed project area was considerably affected by the conflict: it was part of an area where the insurgency had been nurtured and where government security presence had been minimal. Clashes between Maoists and security forces were common in the region. The root causes of the conflict were identified in the design phase documentation of the project as “traditional deep-seated political, economic and social exclusion of people based on class, caste, gender, ethnicity and geographical isolation.” Further, inappropriate development approaches and the absence of development in remote areas were considered as having contributed heavily to the conflict. This last sentiment was voiced also in a discussion with one of my research participants:

MFA official: Yeah – I do think it was for us – from what I gathered from the information received from the Embassy – that it was… that there really wasn’t anyone in the Far West. It was far, it was difficult –

Me: like development cooperation actors?

MFA official: Uhum, yeah. I mean the unfortunate fact was then – I don’t know what the situation is like now – but a majority of all aid stayed in the Kathmandu valley. Also NGO support… So the Kathmandu valley is remarkably more prosperous than the other areas.

…

But, so there weren’t very many donors out there. That was, in my mind, one of the big criterion for us to want to go there. That – and that… it wasn’t merely poverty reduction. There was a perspective in it [the project] from the start, that this is a kind of stabilization. That when you bring in development, that it inevitably also brings stability into the country. This, I feel, was a clear point of departure. That we’ll go in – it won’t be easy, it will be hard… it’s far away… and the Maoists are, … well, everywhere in fact.

Based on insight gained from the preceding years of conflict in Nepal as well as experiences from other conflict prone areas in the world, there was recognition within the Finnish MFA that *“when development programmes seek to function within a conflict context special considerations have to be injected into the overall planning framework.”* Therefore a

550 Interview MFA [56] 2014.
551 My italics.
“full assessment of the overall security situation of the project area” was recommended as an “essential preliminary step in this regard.”

The deliberations on the MFA’s side on whether or not to start up the project in a time of conflict in the first place were explained by one of my research participants in the following way:

Consultant: In 2004… the conflict was of course still ongoing. But somehow Finland was still considering starting up the project. You see, some actors had already left [due to the conflict] by that time… But Helvetas… was working out there in the Far West at the time. Of course, it was small-scale, their project, but still… they were there.

5.2.1 “We went to check out if it would be possible to start the project”

A planning and security mission was carried out between September 29th and October 20th, 2004 in response to the prior recommendation of the MFA as presented in the Terms of Reference for project planning. The objective of the security and planning mission was to “see whether it would be possible to implement the Project as originally planned, or whether any adjustments should be made to the Project and its mode of implementation” so as to “increase its chances of success and sustainability.”

Consultant: … the MFA arranged this kind of – it was called a Security Mission – I mean, we went to check out if it would be possible to start the project… It was October 2004. And… I was the second team member… and… the team leader was this security expert, who looked specifically at the conflict side. And I looked at the possibilities to operate [in the conflict situation] from the perspective of project management… It [the security mission] isn’t part of any normal project cycle…

The overall assessment of the security mission was that the political situation was characterized by great uncertainty. This was seen as leading either to a new round of peace negotiations or an escalation of the conflict. Nevertheless, the mission maintained

552 Ibid.
553 Interview Consultant [48] 2013.
that it “seems right to launch the RVWRMP in the near future.” This perspective was based on the observation that a great deal of development work was going on in the country regardless of the conflict, and that it “could probably [continue to] do so even if there were to be a greater level of fighting than at the present.”

As part of the report on its work, the planning and security mission gave an account of “the various parties’ approach to development work.” The parties discussed in the report were the governmental actors through which development work in rural Nepal is channeled, the security forces, and the Maoists. The governmental actors included the Ministry of Local Development (MLD) at the center, the District Development Committees (DDCs) at the District Head Quarters (DHQ), and the Village Development Committees (VDCs) in the countryside. Through a process of increased decentralization a number of these agencies (as well as non-governmental actors – NGOs and INGOs – discussed in the same section of the report as governmental actors) were described as having become more responsive to their consumers at the time of the design phase of the project: tightening and simplifying financial procedures, and making them more transparent. Overall, the planning and security mission reported that they had witnessed a highly flexible approach on the part of government, INGOs and NGOs, making finances available to projects on the ground in a way that served to increase local ownership.

The security forces, in turn, were described as “not unnaturally” considering development work from “a solely military point of view.” According to the report, the security forces did not allow free movement of materials that might have had any military use. They either did not allow the materials to be used at all, or they allowed them into the countryside only in small amounts, and only as the result of a time-consuming application process for permits. The security forces were said to be suspicious in particular of Nepalese field workers passing the lines from DHQs to project sites and back. The claimed assumption of the security forces was that the field workers and/or the organizations they work for “may have been under the influence of the Maoists, or even sympathize[ing] with them.” The mission report concluded that “[i]n the event of there being any escalation in the fighting, the security forces can be expected to take a more hostile stance towards development work in general and Nepalese field workers in particular.”

557 Ibid.
The Maoists were described in the planning and security mission’s report as taking a close interest in any development work planned for or taking place in the territories they dominated. In general they were said not to have permitted outsiders to enter base areas or areas where they were engaged in sensitive military activity. However, the report found that “the Maoists appear[ed] to be reconsidering their original hardline policy and to be ready in most instances to come to a working arrangement that all parties can live with.” A number of conditions were being imposed in the areas in which the Maoists were said to accept development work. The unpredictability and local specificity of these conditions and working environments with Maoist influence were, however, stressed in the report: “They tend to vary from District to District, from area to area, and even from village to village, and can change, even if only temporarily, because of military necessity or the arrival of a new commander.” The mission report mentioned a number of different types of taxes that the Maoists were reportedly collecting (e.g. a local tax being collected in Dailekh as well as a so-called contract tax) and singled these out as reasons not to enter certain areas nor to use contractors as part of project implementation. Further, the mission reported “some evidence that individual field-based project staff and also [government] staff pay an ‘income tax’…to the Maoists”, concluding that “it seems inevitable that there will be some ‘leakage’ of money to the Maoists.”

The Maoists were further explained as accepting and appreciating District-level coordination of activities, where local agencies play an important role. This was the case in particular if development projects were seen as benefiting local people, if they built rapport and credibility among stakeholders and if they were transparent. Also, the communities’ role was portrayed as crucial in enabling development work:

The Maoists have grown from, and need the support of the people who live in the countryside… whereas the Maoists…will stop or forbid projects, they more often than not lift these bans or stoppages because of requests from the [beneficiary] communities …because they do not wish to lose the people’s support and because they themselves often benefit from the projects.

5.2.2 Security mission identifies risks to be managed

The risks identified during the design phase were related to project staff, materials, completed installations and road safety. The risk of the security situation was assessed as “low” to expatriate staff and “much greater” to Nepalese staff. The report stated:

[T]here is no evidence of any deliberate targeting of foreign development staff by any of the contending parties...[however] there is a risk that foreign staff could accidentally be caught up in fighting between security forces and Maoists, but they would have to be very unlucky.561

Local knowledge and contacts with local staff and beneficiaries were considered key in managing these risks: they “will usually warn foreign staff when it is not safe to visit.”562

The (security) risk of development work in the intended project area was assessed as much greater to Nepalese staff. They spend more time in the field, and have to frequently cross from one zone of interest to another and back again. According to the planning and security mission’s assessment, this “exposes them to suspicion and possible harassment or worse from both the security forces and the Maoists.” Moreover, Nepalese staff was assessed as being unable to work in Maoist-dominated areas unless they would pay a percentage of their earning to the Maoists. It was concluded from this, that while this might give them an increased degree of protection from the Maoists, it might conversely increase the risk of interference from the security forces. The mission declared, however, that despite these risks, Nepalese staff “have the very considerable advantage of being familiar with their areas, and usually have a good informal information network which alerts them to events and hazards that might have an effect on their activities.”563564

Risks to materials, such as pipes and vehicles as well as completed installations were considered low. Materials with possible military use, such as piping made of galvanized iron (GI) was considered as liable to be banned by the security forces or stolen/confiscated by the Maoists. Therefore PVC pipes were recommended, even though they were known to be less durable than GI pipes and fittings. Moreover, due to their high visibility, vehicles used in the project were also considered

563 Ibid.
564 Ibid.
“theoretically vulnerable.” The report mentioned, however, that in the pre-project phase vehicles “have only been immobilized by Maoists’ demands for road tax in certain districts.” It had further been brought to the Mission’s attention, that one vehicle had been stolen in the Far Western region during the design phase, but quickly returned upon the Danish Embassy’s threat to close down all Danida (Danish development aid) projects if it wasn’t given back. Finally, the risk to completed installations was assessed as being very low. This was explained by the fact that beneficiaries value and protect their installations, which are usually also respected by their neighbors. Other than the risks described above, the planning and security mission reported that: “…there would appear to be no real risk, except for that to user groups transporting materials without the security forces’ permission.” The type of risk implied here to the user groups was left undefined, as was the criteria of a “real risk.”

5.2.3 “There is little likelihood that the situation will improve in the foreseeable future, so there is no point in waiting for it to do so”

Based on the information gathered during the planning and security mission, the report concluded that “[i]t should definitely be possible to start the [the project].” In a separate caveat of the report, it was noted that the sections on identified risks as well as the conclusions and recommendations were based “on the assumption that there will be no significant changes in the political and military situation in the next six months.” Noting that this was “a very bold conclusion” the mission’s recommendation was that “the situation should be reviewed in mid- to late November and at intervals prior to any Project commencement.” No recommendation of the kind was made, however, as to the need for reviewing the political and security situation during the possible implementation of the project. In line with the “bold” assumptions made, the report stated: “…there is little likelihood that the situation will improve in the foreseeable future, so there is no point in waiting for it to do so.” The conditions at the time of designing the program were assessed as probably making work “more difficult and time-consuming, but not impossible.”
made, however, of local differences, as well as situations being subject to change due to “military necessity.” Due to the uncertain political and military situation the mission further recommended that the project would need to be started on a reduced scale. In order to manage the identified risks to materials, staff, and completed installations described above, the mission recommended choosing project locations (including the office of the project support unit) that were not near military bases or District Headquarter offices, as well as the use of simple and robust technology with low maintenance requirements.569

The planning and security mission further recommended that the project would adopt a program approach which would be “as flexible as possible, in order to be able to take the reality on the ground fully into account.”570 The closer content or meaning of this “flexibility,” or how it would be practiced, was not, however, further defined. The importance of local ownership of the future project was stressed. This was coined as a recommendation for the project, on the one hand, to be “demand-led”571 and on the other, as being run to the greatest degree possible by the ultimate beneficiaries themselves. Simultaneously, the planning and security mission supported the ideal of impartiality as a programmatic approach, and maintained that this could be achieved by “select[ing the project villages] on clear, fair criteria.” Impartiality was underlined in the mission’s report also with regard to communications with conflict parties: the recommendation was that the project would need to “informally exchange information and discuss issues with the Maoists and adopt a neutral, impartial status in relation to the belligerent parties.”572 Impartiality was pinpointed as one of the most important requirements by one of the consultants who had participated in the security and planning mission:

Consultant: We recommended at the time, that yes work can be carried out there, although there were of course certain restrictions – and particularly the fact that you had to remain impartial – to keep a neutral appearance. I mean otherwise you can’t be [function] there even for a single day, if you appear to be partial.573

570 My italics.
571 The demand-led approach was seen in the security missions report as happening first by way of making prospective project villages aware that Finland was thinking about sponsoring water projects in the area. The second step was envisaged as the interested villages approaching the project’s field staff to express their interest and to begin the process of forming User Committees.
The villages “mak[ing] up their own minds about what they would like to have done” was further considered crucial in terms of increasing beneficiaries’ ownership of the project, giving it “the best chance of surviving any possible disruption.” The recommendation to have the beneficiaries themselves run the project was based on previous experiences in the framework of Finnish and Helvetas’ development projects. “Villagers should be trained so that they can perform important tasks, such as buying in materials, monitoring progress, etc.” Moreover, the planning and security mission stressed in its report, that there should be obvious justification for bringing in expatriate or Nepalese staff from outside the immediate project area. Moreover, “[l]ocal staff and NGOs must be selected very carefully (if possible, by open competition) to ensure that they do not have any past political involvement that might jeopardize the acceptance of the project.” In addition to this, the mission report claimed that “all expatriate and local staff must complete a course in conflict training before they are deployed, and the obligation to adhere to this training and relevant guidelines should form part of their contract.” It was not specified in the report what the closer content of the conflict training should be. The aim of such training implied by the mission was, that all staff would succeed in “maintaining a neutral attitude towards the conflicting parties.” In order for the project to achieve this, the mission report recommended “special training for all staff…on how to behave in different situations and how to operate strictly within the Basic Operational Guidelines.”

Another point strongly advocated by the planning and security mission was complete transparency. All sides of the conflict, including security forces, would need to be kept fully informed of what the project was doing or intending to do. Moreover, “[a]ll project documents…[were to] be…translated into Nepali and available for inspection by interested parties…”, and it was recommended that fund flows should be as simple and direct as possible, with the ultimate destination of every

574 My italics.

575 The Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs) were originally introduced in Nepal in 2003, in the context of the internal armed conflict between the State and the then Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). The armed conflict was having a negative effect on operational space for development organizations, and the BOGs were developed as a way of keeping operational space open and ensuring the security of staff. They allowed development work to continue by clearly explaining the operating principles to all actors concerned. The fundamental principles of the BOGs were defined as impartiality, transparency, accountability and inclusion. The document of operating guidelines was revised with minor changes to the wording in 2007 and it is still valid. See annex 5 for a copy of the Basic Operational Guideline document.

single rupee, apart from individuals’ salaries, being made clear in public accounts, public audits and audit boards. The ability of the project to show concrete achievements as early as possible was also seen as contributing to building trust and increasing transparency.577

In addition to working within the framework of the Basic Operational Guidelines (BOGs), the mission’s report also stressed coordination and cooperation with relevant other development organizations. Finally, in terms of mobilization of the project, the mission made two distinct recommendations related respectively to the idea of a reduced scale start-up and the location of the project’s main office: The mission advocated that the project should be started in Dadeldhura and Doti Districts, and depending on progress there, consideration should be given to extending to one or more neighboring Districts with a security and progress review being conducted before hand. Secondly, it was recommended that the project office should be located in Doti for both practical and political reasons: “We think that the Maoists are far more likely to tolerate an office that is located in the area where the practical work is being done and its benefits are seen than in an area where nothing obvious is going on.”578

5.3 MFA gives go-ahead – emphasis on creation of “favorable operational requirements”

Three years after the project had been initiated, a decision was made at the MFA to continue with its preparations. Based on the security mission’s recommendations as well as on consultations between the Ministry’s Nepal team members and advisers at the Embassy in Kathmandu, the Department for the Americas and Asia at the MFA in Helsinki (ASA-31) concluded that the project could be started in the framework of the Basic Operational Guidelines.579 Any move toward a successful peace agreement was not seen as a realistic turn of events in the coming months, thus the Ministry did not see any particular reason to postpone the beginning of the project any further. The project’s Swiss partnering NGO’s (Helvetas Nepal) long-term presence in the country was seen as facilitating the inception phase. Secondly, starting up the project in the

The given situation was justified by the MFA with the point that it would give beneficiaries an opportunity to improve their living conditions themselves. This in turn was seen as strengthening their position vis-à-vis the Maoists, and would form a new way with which to channel resources allocated to development on to the grassroots level. According to the MFA this would improve the possibility to operationalize development plans in Nepal. Further, the presence of the planned project in Far Western Nepal was seen as having the potential to witness possible human rights abuses by the conflicting parties, and thus also prevent such violations. Moreover, the development impacts of the project were portrayed as having a preventive effect on other human rights issues in the remote areas of Nepal, such as human trafficking. Thirdly, the MFA concluded that the safety measures and short-term modifications to the project approach recommended by the security mission were to be included in the inception report and annual plan, to be prepared by the project organization and approved by its steering committee. The MFA stressed the following points:

The project must from the start place emphasis on creating favorable operational requirements: on the one hand the Maoists must be informed about the rules of the game based on the BOGs, and on the other hand the beneficiaries on the village level must be motivated to create pressure toward the Maoists so that they would accept the project. In view of emergencies, including evacuations, there should be an attempt to ensure the safety of project personnel by devising operational guidance and by networking with other projects active in the area. [The project] should [also] take necessary precautionary measures and procurements, including training, ID cards. The work conducted in Nepal by GTZ and DFID on risk management can be utilized in training project staff. The participation of the Nepalese central government in the funding of the project must be made possible, despite the fact that its contribution cannot be used toward activities outside regional centers. Finally the planning of the work must be flexible: the project team and steering committee must be prepared for changes in the objectives of the annual plans if the changes of the situation in the project area so require. The experiences of the…Lumbini water project (Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Support Programme) must be utilized as an example of project implementation in a conflict area…

As will be described in more detail later in this narrative, the Basic Operational Guideline document was indeed subsequently used as a tool protecting the project

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and its actors against unjustified pressures related to e.g. recruitments and illegal gathering of donations and roadblock fees. Traces of the other points stressed by the MFA, however, were more difficult to find in the rest of my dataset. Some of my research participants did speak about the need for flexibility\textsuperscript{581} in the project, but nowhere in the data did I find signs of GTZ’s and DFID’s risk management work explicitly having been used in the project, as suggested in the memo quoted above. My data also never mentioned any direct interactions of the project with the Maoists or of motivating beneficiaries to create pressure toward them to accept the project. Instead, one of my research participants from the MFA described to me how the point of seeing the Maoists as an obstacle to the project and main cause of contextual problems was in fact later discovered at the Ministry as having been a misperception on their part, or rather a lack of perspective into the complexity of the past conflict:

MFA official: In my opinion what was missing – of course, those who followed Nepal and the conflict and the social development there knew – but still it somehow came all of a sudden as if as a great surprise to [us] donors that there was in fact such a tremendous amount of these different groups there. I mean we had been talking all along just about the “Maoist conflict.” So yeah, of course, it was there, but what about after that? What started to emerge from beneath the surface? All that bubbling and all this ethnically driven commotion…

Me: At what point did you have this “eureka” at the Ministry then?

MFA official: So yeah, it really was as if it had been a surprise. Somehow everyone just expected for this Maoist conflict to be taken care of, like: “Nice, and now let’s just get on with it – but hey, what’s all this strange stuff going on now?” And there were all these criminal groups related to it as well that used the situation to their benefit and were terrorizing. Well – it was…fairly soon…we wondered why everything was just so restless and confusing all the time. It came pretty soon. It was just as if a bottle cap had come loose. Like really – like: “It can’t be! These groups too?” They had been so weak that they hadn’t been able to make enough noise of themselves prior to that.

…

Yeah, but we subsequently recruited this conflict expert [to the Embassy]… whose job it was then to mainstream and look more at these questions.\textsuperscript{582}

\textsuperscript{581} Interview PSU [52] 2014.
\textsuperscript{582} Interview MFA [56] 2014.
Resonating with the surprise effect described in the previous quotation of the complexity of Nepal’s societal situation and conflict background, another research participant shared with me his perspective of the Ministry’s orientation of it’s staff to country knowledge as being “really quite weak.” He maintained that this underlined the importance of good donor cooperation in Kathmandu and relations with Nepali decision-makers as well as other people of influence within the country, and demanded an active approach to networking for employees at the Embassy. He further described as “problematic” that the ultimate decisions about the go-ahead of projects were made in Helsinki, whereas the better “feel for the actual situation” and the prerequisites of aid were in Kathmandu.583

5.3.1 A sign of change in Finnish development thinking

According to one MFA official working with the Nepal country team at the time of the design phase of the project, the decision to go on with project preparations despite the ongoing open violent conflict was linked to a more general shift in development thinking in Finland:

Me: What I’m primarily interested in now is the design phase of the RVWRMP project... I’m interested in hearing your story about this project: what you remember about it, what role you were in with regard to the planning, etc.

…

MFA official: Yeah, it was part of... it was at a time when there were these country teams at the ministry, which we still have... and, um, we were thinking about – like you said – [the fact] that many programs and projects had to be stopped, or... overall, that the prerequisites for carrying them out were pretty weak... the concept of fragile states wasn’t even in the discussions yet at all …

…

Back then … in the OECD/DAC debate [the notion of] … conflict prevention [was topical]. Of course it’s still there, but [at the time,] the emphasis was more strongly on prevention. And conflict sensitivity and conflict thinking were maybe more on the surface. [The decision to proceed

583 Interview MFA [58] 2015.
with project planning despite the conflict]… was derived exactly from these OECD/DAC discussions…”

The above quote reveals that whereas it seemed to have been common in earlier days for Finnish development interventions to be completely stopped and interrupted in situations of tension, the possibility of being able to function in fragile, even conflict-affected contexts was now being considered. This was largely seen as a trickling in of the OECD/DAC debate into the Finnish thinking, including the notions of conflict prevention and conflict sensitivity.

5.3.2 Positive experiences from Lumbini as a backdrop: “We are with the Nepali people going uphill and coming down”

Another factor behind the decision to proceed with planning, and related to the change in development thinking, were the positive experiences with earlier water sector projects that had been carried out during the conflict in the Mid West (Lumbini area):

MFA official: … I remember, that [within the Ministry] I was on my part a kind of speaker on behalf of Nepal… and we had a strong point of departure in the idea that although it was quite challenging to work with the Nepalese government, that we had…good experiences from the water projects in the Mid West… and that there was proof that on the level of local administration we had been able to provide basic services to the villages. And that it worked quite well – and so we started out from the proposition that why couldn’t we then try this out there in the “Wild West” [Far West] too, which was the strongest support area of the Maoists.

After a while the MFA official continued:

…I recall … we used to engage in these conversations [with Under Secretary of State Pertti Majanen and other colleagues at the Ministry], that we [the Finns] are like fellow trekkers of the Nepali people…uphill and down – kind of like… “in sickness and in health – for better or worse” (chuckles). That

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584 Interview MFA [51] 2014. This perspective was confirmed also in Interview MFA [58] 2015.

585 In addition to the interview cited here, the legacy of the Lumbini project as representing Finnish development cooperation experience of working in the midst of conflict came up a number of times in my research data, both in the project documentation as well as in discussions with project stakeholders representing e.g. the MLD (interview [46] 2008) and the PSU (interview [48] 2013).
we are with them in it, going up the hill as well as coming down … that we didn’t see the grounds for quitting with development cooperation just because it was a politically difficult situation.

So we had experienced a change in our thinking … in Sri Lanka in the 80s, you know, there was that conflict, and we left. And in Sudan a conflict emerged and we left from there too… In Somalia there was a conflict and we left in the 80s… And so [this time with Nepal] there was a new thought that had emerged in international thinking – although we weren’t even talking about the problems of fragile states at the time yet – that it doesn’t actually help a whole lot, if you just leave… that we should try to find some kinds of instruments and modes of operation and ways of working with which to produce those [lacking] basic services. Basic service delivery – for the ordinary people. Despite the conflict.

Me: Where did this idea come from? …

MFA official: Probably from the idea that the water sector in particular – that it’s like such a basic service. And um – it’s like working in conflict areas, which isn’t in the end then –

Me: working on the conflict?

MFA official: Yes! We didn’t want to actually go into the political questions. But maybe it was this kind of change in [our] thinking, which most probably [came] from those OECD/DAC discussions… there was this conflict and peace… this group that [we] attended too in the DAC… so this thinking was brought in from there. That instead of pulling out [of conflict zones], one should take the bull by its horns… but not [necessarily] by going into the political structures so strongly, but by trying to find these kinds of fairly neutral… water and sanitation issues, which all parties need anyway.

And then at the same time, the donor consortium created the Basic Operational Guidelines [BOGs]… and Finland joined in on that. – It was there that the parameters were found for the way in which international organizations can support development projects in areas controlled by the Maoists. The BOGs were … a central instrument…

But we wanted – maybe we thought that water and sanitation…that it’s somehow like un-political – and that it’s… [carried out] through the local administration, and this community based approach was strong – that there was such strong [local] ownership. That this had produced [good] results in …the Lumbini area, that it could be tried out there in the ‘Wild West’ too.

And it did get to a pretty good start… there too. So there was a clear paradigm shift for us there in the early 2000s. The idea that… it’s possible to
operate in those kinds of areas and to make use of [various] operational approaches.\footnote{Interview MFA [51] 2014.}

As mentioned above, the decision to proceed with the project was strongly based on positive experiences of project implementation during the conflict. In addition to this it was portrayed by the above research participant as being a manifestation not only of a “paradigm shift” in development thinking, but also of Finland’s commitment to Nepal as a development partner. Quitting development cooperation was not seen as justified for the mere reason of the context being a “politically difficult situation.”

5.3.3 Decision based on intuition and conscious risk-taking

Ultimately, the decision at the Ministry to give a go-ahead for the project in the conflict situation was a case of conscious \textit{risk-taking based on intuition} of it being “the right thing to do” as opposed to being founded on any particular concrete analyses of the situation:

Me: Well, how then – or… what I have found in the documentation… are statements saying that “the political situation is such that…” and “it seems right to continue despite the conflict” and so on. So in reading these, I was often left wondering … is this based on some kind of analysis? Was there analysis [in the background], maybe done by someone else in the area, and that I just wasn’t finding it in the data available? I mean, would [information of] such analysis be in the confidential documents\footnote{Political reports by Ambassadors and Charge d’Affairs are held confidential for 25 years. E-mail correspondence with MFA Archivist, 20.1.2015. See also \textit{Act on the Openness of Government Activities: 621/1999}; amendments to 907/2015 included.}? In the Ambassador’s [Charge d’Affairs’] political analyses? Or was… such [political or context] analysis maybe done by the country teams?

MFA official: No, no you won’t find any secret file in which you would find in-depth analysis… rather…in the background [of decision-making] was just the fact that we wanted to take this kind of a conscious risk and also to tolerate that risk and there was precisely this kind of fairly strong idea about the fact that in the ‘Wild West’ [Far Western Nepal] in particular, and behind the uprising of the Maoists, was… poverty, and [the reality] that the administrative modalities of the Nepalese state did not…were not capable of producing the basic services that were missing there.
... So... in a way, in the backs of our minds, even though it may not have been written out [so clearly]... was the understanding of the [Nepalese] state’s incapability being at the foundations of poverty and violence – I mean that it wasn’t capable of producing those services – this was one of the key thoughts, which is why the situation there was what it was, and which gave us the grounds to go in ... to take part in fixing the situation on our part. And to take the conscious risk in doing so,

Me: Yes?

MFA official: because we had proof that it had worked in other areas before – this was the thinking.

Me: It’s interesting that you put it in this way. Because I’ve had this feeling all along that I must not be finding or seeing something, which led me to the conclusion that the decision-making [at the Ministry] has been quite intuitive...

MFA official: Exactly, yes.

... 

Me: ... and now that you speak in this way, I feel like you’ve just been sensitive [to the situation] in the decision-making of the early phases – ... that you’ve had an inkling that it would be worth trying it out. Without having all the systematic analyses done, which is today the recommendation [for working in fragile contexts]?

MFA official: Exactly.

Me: And that even so, you’d in a way been “on the right track” [in Lumbini]... ?

MFA official: Yes, exactly – well put! It was extremely intuitive. You are not going to find – because even I wouldn’t find it anywhere – any thick document containing in-depth political analysis – or even societal analysis... of the Far West, including all the details... based on which then decisions to go or not to go would have been made. There is no such thing.

Me: What about [the use of] UN analyses? ... UNDP country offices have been conducting these development space analyses for years I guess, and ... I found in the correspondence documents [between the Embassy and MFA Helsinki] claims stating that “based on the UN’s analysis the situation is deemed as safe for starting up the project.” Although the archiving is not quite waterproof in this sense [as the attachments referred to in the
correspondence were missing and not specified] – apparently some of these UN background analyses have been consulted at the Embassy in assessing the situation?

MFA official: Yeah, they may have glanced at some, but yeah – ha-ha (laughs out, as if in slight embarrassment) – (seriously) the answer to your question is “no.” I don’t recall any, like “here’s the file and that’s the analysis based on which we do things.” Rather, it’s just from various streams and drops [of information] that we formed the general picture.

…

And it might also be – so typical of our organization, that there has been some paper. I don’t even remember – I relocated [to another post abroad] just around that time – maybe someone did take charge… or … yeah, it is quite possible that attention was just not – (chuckles again) paid. Or that it has just been viewed from such a technical perspective. That’s so typical for us. 588

Despite the complete lack of contextual and conflict analyses on part of the MFA, the above quote shows that there seems to have been a solid, yet implicit understanding of the inability of the Nepalese government to act as a duty bearer in providing basic services to its citizens, which in turn had contributed toward poverty and violence.

5.3.4 (One-way) risk identification and down-scaling as risk management

Later on in my discussion with the same research participant from the MFA 589 we recurrently came back to the theme of risks and risk-taking. I came to understand through this discussion that the perspective at the Ministry concerning risks was one-way, from the context toward the project, and moreover that no particular analyses had been conducted to assess the risks to the intervention:

Me: What you said [before] about [the decision to proceed with] the project… regardless of what the analysis would have been on the development space, had such [an analysis] been done… you basically

acknowledged that the situation was chaotic and that still that conscious risk could be taken and [you could] just go ahead. On a small scale?

MFA official: Yes, exactly.

Me: This scale thing is actually something that emerges [from the project documentation] … [the idea] that the project would be started on a limited scale in just two locations. As a practical solution [to managing the risks foreseen]?

MFA official: Yes, that’s correct, that’s how it was. And that is the whole basic feel or underlying current of all of our support to Nepal. All through the whole first decade after 2000. During the entire Maoist conflict, but then it started to change [after] the Comprehensive Peace Agreement… the whole gear shifted after that.

Me: …when we were talking about taking a conscious risk, and also through reading the project documents, I’m starting to see that there is quite a bit of talk about risks: That we’ll take a risk –

MFA official: Yes?

Me: and [about] what the risks are, and to whom. In the project documents … the risk is seen as being one that threatens the success of the intervention, or its entire realization.

MFA official: Yes.

Me: And within that [narrative] what it is to the Nepali and international [project] staff. That in some way the thinking is strongly in the direction that the risk that one is prepared for, or that is taken is toward the intervention. And that has been … maybe a bit of a surprise from my perspective – Because in current PCIA (Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment) – type of thinking it’s viewed both ways. I mean that when going into a certain context you not only think about the risk that that context poses to ‘our intervention,’ but that you predominantly make an assessment as to what the risk, in a sense, is to that context.

MFA official: Yes?

Me: That you consider the possible effects of being there and bringing in resources.

MFA official: Yeah, like what would cause local conflicts?
Me: Yes, or just intensify existing tensions even – or that the intervention in some ways changes the dynamics.

MFA official: Yeah, the outside intervention of course always brings in resources and the balance on the micro level [of society]… and someone gets something and benefits, and someone doesn’t get and doesn’t benefit, and yes – that’s it. Yeah, we didn’t make any of these kinds of analyses at all in that time. And we didn’t really have the know-how or the instruments, or even the experts for this, that we could have at least outsourced such work. So you’re right [in saying] that the risk thinking was – and still is! – predominantly one-way. Now we do talk more about risk management and it’s been mainly – I mean originally risk management has been largely about [preventing] misuse of funds… when you talk about risks, you talk about bad governance, corruption, and that you just loose your money. And then in the domestic media, … when funds have gone, and it’s of course a strong – especially in this financial situation… But so secondly there’s this “reputational risk” – … what we look like – mainly domestically. And then [thirdly] there’s the concern of what kind of physical danger there is to the project itself.

5.4 Royal Coup freezes the project

Due to the recommendations of the security mission conducted in late 2004, preparations were made for arranging a signing ceremony of the project contract in Kathmandu in early February 2005, and to start up with the project shortly thereafter. The plan was for the Finnish Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Paula Lehtomäki to travel to Nepal to attend the event as well as take part in broader bilateral discussions between Finland and Nepal in anticipation of bilateral consultations scheduled to be held in Helsinki later in the Spring. At this juncture, however, King Gyanendra had deployed the Nepalese army in a counter-insurgency role and dissolved the elected government. On February 1st 2005 the King conducted what later came to be known as the Royal Coup, with which he seized absolute control of the country.590

King Gyanendra sacked the government on Tuesday and declared a state of emergency. The telephone service is suspended for the time being and some of the civil rights defined in the constitution of Nepal have been revoked. Nepal is one of Finland's eight long-term development cooperation partners.

590 Caldecott et al., Evaluation: The Country Programme between Finland and Nepal 32.
Minister Lehtomäki was scheduled to have bilateral discussions with the leadership of Nepal on the political crisis, the decade-long Maoist insurgency, and the development partnership between Nepal and Finland. Minister Lehtomäki emphasises the fact that despite the internal crisis Finnish development aid will not be discontinued.591

Essentially, however, the Royal Coup amounted to stalling all activities planned for project start-up, beginning with the cancelled contract signing ceremony. One research participant shared with me that not everyone had been too happy about the decision to freeze up the project:

MFA official: After what had happened [i.e. the Royal Coup], the ongoing [Finnish] projects were allowed to continue. But the Far West project was frozen. The Embassy was...there were all kinds of opinions on that decision... Pauli Mustonen, who was Head of the Embassy at the time – and then died tragically in this helicopter crash – ... he, I believe was one of those, who felt it to be a kind of bad decision, in a way, this freezing.

Me: How did this become evident?

MFA official: Well it became evident in discussions, I don’t think – I don’t remember if he wrote any ASKIs592 [formal documents of the MFA], but um – as there were two kinds of opinions to this, ... – as there always are in these kinds of situations – I mean who, in the end suffers the most?

But then, you know, we arranged an extremely interesting... with CMI593 ... a small seminar here in Helsinki, to which we invited these NGO representatives [from Nepal]...

... there was this one NGO representative who had a really critical view...on donor support[, and who] felt – and this I feel is the one extreme – that “just quit all of your support, you are just supporting the establishment anyway, if you support [the country]. Cut off everything!”


592 The acronym ASKI refers in the MFA’s jargon to the Finnish language word asiakirja, which means document.

593 CMI (Crisis Management Initiative) is a Finnish non-profit organization specialized on conflict resolution, founded by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, President Martti Ahtisaari, in 2000.
And then there’s the other end who feel that it’s the poor who suffer the most… he [Pauli Mustonen] had a very strong view on this.594

All in all, the situation in Nepal, and the Spring of 2005 in particular, seems to have been a confusing time for the planning of development programs and cooperation with Nepal. My perspective into this time period remained limited, however, as I found there to be a complete silence in my research data between December 2004 and April 2005. Based on my discussions with former members of the MFA Nepal team, it is likely that most of the deliberations about Finnish cooperation with Nepal were conducted between the Embassy’s staff and the Ministry’s Nepal team members over the telephone or by e-mail, none of which has been documented.595 One of my research participants spoke of his discussions during that time with the then Charge d’Affairs of the Finnish Embassy, Pauli Mustonen:

MFA official: … I would claim that my role [in the project] was the strongest when we started – when we were making the decisions that we should go in [with this project].

Me: Well, do you recall – if we go back to the beginnings, you mentioned that you were friends with Pauli? – So do you have, or would you want to share any recollections you might have of … discussions with him from that time?

MFA official: I’m trying to remember – it was at the time when… Pauli died when I was [abroad], and the last time I saw him was… that Spring [2005] … we had this conversation [with Pauli], … we didn’t have a clue as to what would happen in Nepal, because the Maoists had a strong grip on things, but so did the government – so there wasn’t any clear escape out of the situation yet. … But it was a terribly chaotic situation, and there was no real clarity…about what it would all lead to.

…

I remember… that the basic message and narrative was, that let’s try now [in any case] to operate in those areas, … in the water sector, and… the education sector, because the idea was, that it is also a case of producing basic services. And then there were these forestry projects… the idea was… they [the projects] were all a kind of basic support to life and livelihood. That was kind of the big picture that we discussed at the time. The daily

594 Interview MFA [56] 2014.
politics was so unpredictable, and it didn’t really seem to affect that big picture at all, one way or the other.

Me: Yeah – that in a way underlines the point you brought up earlier, about the idea that a conscious risk can be taken?

MFA official: Exactly.596

5.4.1 Political instability escalates, changes cooperation guidelines

The Royal Coup was understood at the MFA in Helsinki as one phase in a long process, which Nepal had been in since 1951. In April 2005, shortly after the coup, the guideline on cooperation between Finland and Nepal was updated to reflect the politically unstable situation. Whether the recent events would constitute a long-term backlash for democracy and the country’s general development or if they were merely a passing episode in a much longer process was left undefined. In any case, it was decided at the Ministry that the immediate impacts of the political instability on development cooperation with Nepal needed to be assessed. The general point of departure for the updated guideline on cooperation was that the principles of long-term partnership would be followed by adjusting the development cooperation program to the circumstances of the internal conflict in Nepal. The objective of the program was to positively affect both the resolution of the conflict as well as the extreme poverty and marginalization at the root of the conflict.597

Finland’s first priority in Nepal is to strengthen the operational context in a way that is favorable to the country’s development[. This can be done] by supporting the immediate peaceful resolution of the Maoist conflict and the political crisis in a way that contributes to the democratization process. Finland’s fundamental long-term goal is to affect the reduction of extreme poverty, which lies at the root of the Nepalese conflict…The cross-cutting principles are building the capacity of local level actors, sustainable development of the environment, the improvement of the role of women, as well as benefits for the most backward regions and the population groups in the weakest position.598

The updated guideline on Finnish – Nepalese cooperation took note of the international aid community’s contiguous stance on striving to continue with development cooperation despite the conflict, whilst developing more effective forms of action. It was further explained in the guideline how, as part of the cooperation within the international aid community, there was an ongoing process of developing a common and concrete set of criteria for evaluating the situation in terms of development cooperation. This was linked to the work being done in the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee on development cooperation in so-called “Fragile State situations.” The preliminary emerging criteria were described as follows: a) Can projects and programs effectively have an impact on poverty reduction in this situation (development space), b) Can the diversion of resources toward security expenditure be avoided (fungibility), c) Can the safety of people working for projects and programs be secured, d) Does aid contribute to prolonging the state of emergency or does it prevent restoring democracy (do no harm). According to one of the former employees of the Embassy, these discussions on the international aid actors’ agenda had a strong impact also on the thinking around Finnish aid in Nepal.

5.4.2 Country consultations cancelled, project set on standby

Bilateral consultations on cooperation between Nepal and Finland were scheduled for mid-April 2005 in Helsinki. In the changed political situation the Department of the Americas and Asia (ASA-31) at the MFA felt that the preconditions for conducting the planned consultations no longer existed. ASA-31 thus proclaimed that all consultations with Nepal would be postponed until the autumn of the same year. That was when the possibility to reopen discussions would be re-evaluated. In terms of development cooperation projects the Finnish MFA’s guidance followed that of the EU: ongoing projects would be continued for the time being, but the signing of all new project contracts with the Nepalese government would be halted until at least the next planned situation assessment at the end of May. Essentially, it was at this

600 Interview Embassy [58] 2015.
601 Local cooperation projects (Paikallisen yhteistyön määrärahoin toteutettavat PYM hankkeet), and NGO projects were continued and the decision was that also new commitments could be made concerning them. Moreover, support was continued to UN-agencies, international NGOs as well as humanitarian aid.
juncture that the formal decision was made for all further preparations for the case study project to be discontinued until “the security situation in the region would enable positive operational conditions for project implementation.” It was nevertheless also resolved at the time that all projects under preparation would be held on standby. This way work could be started up again rapidly, should the political situation allow. This was the case also for the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project.

One of my research participants explained in our conversation about the project’s design phase that the decisions taken by the EU in the aftermath of the Royal Coup were key in enabling the smooth restarting of the project later on:

PSU employee: This thing, [the fact] that the King decided to take absolute power [into his own hands]. It set into reverse… the political freedom… And donors reacted to that extremely… As far as I recall…[some donors] pulled out of Nepal completely at the time. They quit their projects. And EU considered extremely carefully [the option of] pulling out too… in which case Finland would have had to leave – had EU made such a decision. … So… it was a critical moment, if EU would then have decided to pull out of Nepal, it would have been quite difficult to start up again later…

…it could even have been that this project would never have been started up at all… so it came quite close, in that sense.

… Finland would not have wanted to rebel against EU decisions, although it wasn’t in the Finnish interest to stop [everything]… After all, Finland had projects running. And somehow everything had gone fairly well, in a way, despite the ongoing conflict.

The view stressing the importance of leaving the project on a standby status, as opposed to closing it down or cancelling it completely, was echoed in another discussion I had with a former Ministry official about her perspectives into Finnish-Nepali development cooperation at the time of the project:

MFA official: Finland didn’t halt [all of its aid], like some countries – in other words, we felt that it’s better to be present, if and when the situation changes, so then we can proceed quickly…

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604 Interview PSU [48] 2013.
5.5 Assessment of political situation and grounds for continuing cooperation

Head of Department Pekka Metso from the MFA in Helsinki travelled to Nepal at the end of May 2005 on a fact-finding mission. The purpose of his trip was to get a picture of the prevailing political situation in the country as well as to make an assessment of the grounds for continuing Finnish – Nepali development cooperation. The outcome of this assessment would have its implications for this case study project too. In the four months after the Royal Coup, a majority of the international community had been trying in various ways to assert pressure on King Gyanendra in order to restore multi-party democracy and freedom of civil rights, as well as to improve the human rights situation. The most efficient instruments in this regard had been cutting off military support and placing Nepal under inspection in the UN Human Rights Commission’s meeting in Geneva, as well as the resolution to found a monitoring office of the UN’s High Commissioner of Human Rights in Kathmandu. Also the isolation of the King, Foreign Minister and Nepali administration from the international community was portrayed as having been an effective advocacy method. The fact that Nepal had been singled out as a target for negative attention within the international community, was said to have been a shock for the country’s elite.

Development cooperation was one of the methods with which the international community aimed to assert pressure on the King and administration in Nepal. Mr. Metso met three Nepali ministers in addition to other representatives of the administration, none of whom had seemed too upset with the freezing of development projects such as the ones Finland was planning in the remote regions of the country, often thought of as Maoist areas. At least part of the administration representatives that Mr. Metso had spoken to, had seemed to think that resources from these

606 According to information provided by the MFA Archives, “the purpose of the trip was to get acquainted with the political situation in Nepal and the meetings supported this aim: Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Minister of Finance, Chairpersons of two political parties, Ambassadors of USA, India etc. The document reports shortly on these discussions and it is confidential. Based on the Act on Publicity of Government Documents, it is thus to be held confidential for 25 years. Therefore it is unfortunately not available for research use.” E-mail correspondence MFA Archives, 23.1.2015.

607 The USA, India and Great Britain were said to have started up so-called non-lethal military support to Nepal again fairly soon after this. See Guidelines for Cooperation between Nepal and Finland 31.5.2005, ASA-31 15.6.2005.

projects would probably end up going to the Maoists any way, and therefore the freezing of new projects had not been frowned upon. The effect of using pressure through tightening the screws on development aid flows was further seen as being diminished by the fact that the biggest donors, i.e. Japan, USA and international development finance institutions as well as India had refrained completely from freezing their assistance. The cancellations and freezing of aid assets publicized in the Nepali media concerned Danish, Swiss, Canadian, British and Finnish aid, as well as a loan by the World Bank\textsuperscript{609}. The sum effect of these actions was some 10-20\% of the total aid volume to Nepal. Moreover, the decrease in development cooperation payments was not expected to have an effect on the state budget until after a lapse of several years.\textsuperscript{610}

In the situation described above, the MFA decided that the most effective action for Finland would be to continue its “strict human rights policy toward Nepal.”\textsuperscript{611} Also the support to political parties aiming to restore democracy in the country was portrayed as something to be continued at this juncture. In terms of new development cooperation contracts, the decision was not to start any new projects with the government for the time being. Preparations for the completion phase of one ongoing environmental project, as well as funding to the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights were the only exceptions in this regard. In terms of the case study project of this research, the overall assessment of Mr. Metso’s fact-finding mission was that the prerequisites for continued cooperation with Nepal with regard to improvements in democracy and governance did not exist.\textsuperscript{612} Therefore the project was still kept on hold. It was decided at this juncture, moreover, that bilateral consultations for cooperation between Nepal and Finland would not be held until the end of 2005, earliest.\textsuperscript{613}

\textsuperscript{609} The 70 million USD World Bank loan had, however, been cancelled due to the failure to achieve certain technical criteria for the credit, and not due to the political situation.


\textsuperscript{611} The guideline document did not specify what was meant by the strict human rights policy.

\textsuperscript{612} The guideline document did not disclose what these prerequisites for continued cooperation were.

\textsuperscript{613} Guidelines for Cooperation between Nepal and Finland 31.5.2006, ASA-31, 15.6.2005. The next bilateral consultations on cooperation between Nepal and Finland were, however, not arranged until October 2007: Minutes of Bilateral Consultations between Nepal and Finland, 5.10.2007, UM 93.10 Nepal-Suomi, kehitysyhteistyö yleensä (Kathmandu: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Finland and Ministry of Finance, Nepal, 2007).
5.5.1 Positive developments in political situation give way to project start

... [I]n the beginning of 2006...that’s when things started to happen – the [Nepalese] parties started meeting one another and then in April 2006 the King was overthrown and – well, then the conflict started to fall into the background... it started a long process, which is actually still going on.\textsuperscript{614}

There was yet another period of silence in my research data between June 2005 and the spring of 2006. As before, I learned through discussions\textsuperscript{615} with research participants at the MFA that the dialogue between the Ministry in Helsinki and the Embassy in Kathmandu during this time had happened orally in telephone conversations with the Charge d’Affairs Pauli Mustonen as well as over e-mail correspondence. None of these communications had been archived. I was thus left with very little view of what went on in terms of political surveillance of the situation in Nepal during this time. The spring of 2006 had however brought about a significant positive shift to the political situation in Nepal. A demonstration campaign mobilized by the political parties led to the reinstatement of the parliament, the formation of a new government and the restriction of the role of the King as a ceremonial figure. The government and the Maoists agreed on a ceasefire and started peace negotiations. In the second round of negotiations the parties signed an eight point accord in which there was an agreement to bring down the Maoists’ and parliament administrative structures as well as to form a new constitution and government. Constitutional Assembly Elections were being planned. As a result of these positive developments – and partly in response to a donor meeting arranged by the Nepalese Minister of Finance whereby a request was voiced to restart all frozen and diminished projects – several international donors in Nepal announced resuming their development cooperation activities and commitments to prior levels.\textsuperscript{616}

MFA official: Elections were in view, and this, that and the other started happening – but so when the situation changed, these planned – even this planned water project, which hadn’t been started because it was to be carried out in the Maoist conflict area – I recall that it was specifically for these reasons, that it wasn’t possible to go into those areas. But so when the conflict ended, the project planning was started a-new.\textsuperscript{617}

\textsuperscript{614} Interview MFA [55] 2014.
\textsuperscript{615} Interviews MFA [55,56] 2014.
\textsuperscript{617} Interview MFA [55] 2014.
Also the Embassy of Finland in Kathmandu reported to the Ministry in Helsinki on “development cooperation and the new political situation in Nepal.” In the report, the Embassy staff described how the newly appointed Nepalese Minister of Finance Ram Sharan Mahat had promised to mend the finance political mistakes made by the previous government, and to hasten the reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure as well as possible delivery of first aid. The goal of these plans was described as being a permanent peace agreement and the creation of a process with which the problems at the root of Nepal’s conflict could be solved, and with which to decrease the so-called democracy deficit. In addition to the already ongoing support activities based on the country’s own poverty reduction strategy, the Embassy’s assessment was that Nepal would be needing help in the peace process, the constitutional process, as well as in various reconstruction activities. The report claimed that a shared perspective by all donors and aid providers active in Nepal was that whatever actions were taken in the field of development cooperation, all aid should be needs driven, coordinated, conflict sensitive and inclusive.\footnote{\textit{Memo, KAT 15.5.2006, Nepal: development cooperation and the new political situation, UM 93.10, Nepal: Kehitysyhdistyö yleensä} (Kathmandu: Embassy of Finland, 2006) My translation.}

5.5.2 A call for conflict sensitivity and linking peace with development

While waiting for Nepal to reveal its own reconstruction program, donors and aid providers started to pick up with their development activities and to restart projects that had been frozen down earlier due to the conflict. In reference to this, the Embassy declared that particular attention should be paid to the conflict sensitivity of all projects and aid, in order not to "add conflict" or contribute to the reasons that had led to the Nepalese conflict in the first place. Moreover, the Embassy recommended that Finnish support be directed more clearly than before to the poorest areas and marginalized groups in the country. Further, in terms of conflict resolution and the democratization process in Nepal, the Embassy stressed that it was crucial that all development activity would be even more participatory and transparent than before. In addition to the central stakeholders of development projects, the Embassy underlined the importance of the participation of marginalized groups traditionally left outside all processes (women, Dalits, ethnic groups, disabled people) in the planning and monitoring of development action.\footnote{\textit{Memo, KAT 15.5.2006a.} Central in shaping the thinking behind these recommendations at the}
Embassy was a review620 of the Education for All –program, which was commissioned in 2006 by the Finnish Embassy on behalf of the group of the program’s supporting donors. The study examined the program in relation to conflict and the current political crisis and brought the language and concept of conflict sensitivity strongly to the fore. According to a former employee of the Embassy, the work around this review had also had a clear effect on the thinking around the case study project at hand. A central point of departure in all of the Embassy’s work and discussions around development projects was the principle of Do No Harm. “The conflict itself and the conflict sensitivity of our work were discussed at the Embassy every day!”621

At this same juncture Charge d’Affairs a.i. Mr. Pauli Mustonen presented to the Ministry in Helsinki that the Finnish guidance on development cooperation with Nepal should be changed to reflect the positive developments with regard to the peace process. His recommendation was that the ban on signing intergovernmental agreements on development cooperation projects should be repealed. He further proposed that work be restarted on the rural water and sanitation projects that had been frozen due to the conflict. The justification for this proposal was stated as being linked to the potential of helping to stabilize the political situation through development cooperation and thereby preventing the country from sliding back into conflict. Development cooperation was portrayed in Mr. Mustonen’s memo as being significant for at least three different sectors in Nepal: the solidifying of democracy and supporting the preparations for a new constitution; the support to the Nepalese peace process; as well as the reconstruction and long-term poverty reduction processes. Mr. Mustonen claimed that democracy work and support to the peace process required careful preparation and coordination both among Nepalese actors as well as between local actors and among foreign donors. He stated that competition and seeking prestige should be avoided, and that in these two abovementioned areas the initiative should come from Nepalese actors with particular clarity. Long-term poverty reduction through development cooperation projects and programs was portrayed by the Charge d’Affairs as ”less sensitive” from the perspective described above. Here too, however, he claimed that the conflict sensitivity of the projects as well as the Do No Harm principle should be considered. For this reason he recommended that the modalities,

621 Interview Embassy [58] 2015.
feasibility and schedule of the projects that had been frozen due to the conflict should be discussed again prior to restarting work on them.  

5.6 Ban on signing bilateral contracts repealed – security situation “much better but by no means free of problems”

And then a year passed [since the freezing of the project] – in the summer of 2006, or late Spring they started to ponder at the MFA again, whether the situation would have calmed down… [and they started to think about] restarting the project.  

The guideline on development cooperation between Nepal and Finland was updated at midsummer 2006 following the Embassy’s recommendations, and the ban on signing intergovernmental contracts was repealed. The guideline noted, however, that despite positive developments in the political situation, “…the country remains unstable and … will be needing external assistance in carrying out both the peace process as well as the constitutional and democratization processes.”

In the move toward actually launching the project during the summer of 2006, the project meeting at the MFA in Helsinki made note of the fact that all of the cooperation partners for the project (Helvetas, WB, and ADB) had continued their projects despite the unstable situation in the country, and that all three of these counterparts supported the proposed model and welcomed the launching of the Finnish project. This seemed to provide reassurance to the decision-makers within the project team at the Ministry: despite the identified risks related to the instability of the intended project area, work could be started up. Also the past experiences of success in carrying out a water project in the midst of conflict elsewhere in Nepal were strongly in the background of the decision-making:

During the entire conflict there have been development cooperation projects active in the region. At times the projects have had to be suspended, but have later been continued. The biggest providers of aid in the area are the

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Asian Development Bank, UN Agencies (UNICEF, WFP, IFAD), Switzerland and Dutch SNV...

Since the declaration of the ceasefire by the Maoists in April 2006, the direct violence in the project area has diminished significantly. The Maoists’ active participation in local affairs has come in as a new element. The security situation in terms of implementing the project is satisfactory. It is better than [was the case] in the area of the Lumbini water project, which ended last year. The implementing agency of the project as well as the local staff has experience from the Lumbini project and the working modalities developed there are also in use in this project. Most significant in terms of the safety of project personnel is the mode of operation, based on water [User] Committees formed by local inhabitants. [The User Committees] have a central role in guiding the activities and acquiring local funding. The Committees also closely monitor the use of funds.

As explained earlier, Finnish Consulting Group (FCG) had won the tender for the project before it had been frozen. The Ministry thus contacted FCG and asked if the bidding team was still available, and if so, that then a contract could be signed:

... I was [working abroad] in another MFA project at the time. But it was quite easy to switch over from there, to agree on this with the same client...and the Belgian guy on the second post... luckily happened to be available, so we were able to show that we had the same [team]. And so we were able to start it [the project] up easily then in the autumn of 2006.

Starting up the project and allocating 4 million euros of missing funds to it from another unused budget was portrayed by the MFA as being an affirmative signal to the government of Nepal for the positive developments in the recent past with regard to the conflict.

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628 Interview PSU [48] 2013.
629 In the beginning of project preparations it had not been possible to grant funding for the entire Finnish share of the planned budget in one go. This was due to limited authorization of granting fund allocations to Nepal issued in 2003. It was thus suggested within the ministry that an additional 4 million euros would be allocated to the RVWRMP project from unused funds reserved for Afghanistan.
630 Ibid.
Whereas the political instability, and subsequently conflict history, of the proposed project area was distinctly present in the documentation from the early design phase, it was less tangible when moving toward the commencement of the project. There were, however, some notable exceptions to this especially in the correspondence concerning the project between the Embassy and the Ministry in Helsinki as well as in the Final Project Document. The late Charge d’Affairs Pauli Mustonen’s assessment of the political situation in the country in July 2006 was optimistic: although portraying the intended geographical area of the project as being set in an area with strong Maoist influence and making note of the fact that during the conflict the presence of government actors in the region was significantly challenged, he concluded that the security situation in the project area was now much better than it had been at the time of making the decision originally to start up with the project in December 2005. He reminded, however, that the situation is “by no means free of problems” and stressed that in the mobilization phase of the project a security strategy would be made according to original plans. What was meant by “security strategy” and which exact “original plan” the Ambassador was referring to in his memo was, however, left undefined. Water Resource Adviser Eero Kontula in turn stressed in his statement of July 2006 that as the (political/conflict) situation had improved, there was a great need to start up the project as soon as possible.

In a chapter of the Final Project Document describing the present situation in the proposed project area, in turn, note was made of decentralization in the country still being in transition. This was further portrayed as possibly being manifested as “conflicting interests” and “differences between central and local level about the pace and extent to decentralization.” With regard to the envisaged results in service improvement in the areas of water supply, sanitation, irrigation and energy, among the indicators marking sustainability of the project were those concerning local institutional capacity. Systems for learning, conflict resolution and problem-solving being in place were thus defined as markers for sustainability of results in these sectors.

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631 Final Project Document, July 2006, UM 93.20 NEP.
Further, in reference to the risks and assumptions identified for project implementation during the design phase, it was pointed out in the Final Project Document that “possible political instabilities in the project area may cause delays and other problems to the project during its implementation.” The respective assumption, however, was that “project activities not be unduly hampered by the security issues.” No explanation was given in the document as to how this assumption had been arrived at, other than that a detailed problem analysis had been conducted for the project based on meetings and field visits. The point concerning possible political instabilities was reiterated in a discussion concerning the economic and financial feasibility of the project. In addition to the potential of causing delays and other problems, the possible political instabilities were seen in the worst case as giving grounds to abandoning the project in the middle of implementation, “resulting in considerable financial losses.” It was further noted, that the “mitigation of this risk is beyond the means of the project” and that “[a] careful assessment of the political and physical safety situation should [therefore] be made before starting the project.

Finally, in the section of the Final Project Document accounting for the “added value” of the Finnish Government financed project and its relation to other foreign donor funded major sector projects, a claim was made that the case study project would focus on and demonstrate integrated and efficient planning of water resources at local level, “including arrangements for settling potential conflicts and disputes related to the allocation of water resources among different sub-sectors or interest groups.” This would be achieved; the claim was made, by giving broader consideration for water resource needs of so-called downstream users, particularly in resource-scarce areas. The envisaged multi-purpose approach to developing projects related to water and sanitation development was further seen as fostering community relations and inter-community sharing of limited resources. A former MFA official and member of the Nepal country team at the Ministry spoke on this same point, as she was telling me about her recollections of resuming with project preparations in 2006 and the changes that followed:

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636 This point was already in the Outline Project Document January 2002, UM 93.20 NEP as well as in the 2004 version of the project document Project Document: Final Report, 21.1.2004, UM 93.20 NEP. My italics.


I recall that originally the project design had been intended more narrowly as a [technical] water and sanitation project, but due to the conflict the thinking changed into a broader, a kind of natural resources [management] project. I can’t remember now what all it included, but I do recall that the focus [of the project]…specifically because of the conflict, [was intended to be such] that we could tackle the causes behind the conflict. That – we could improve the peoples’ living conditions a bit more broadly.\(^{640}\)

\(^{640}\) Interview MFA [55] 2014.
As discussed in the previous chapter, the political instability and subsequent events within the project area had clearly affected the early design and planning of the project. They lead first to careful considerations about the feasibility of starting up implementation; a decision in late 2004 to go ahead with the project despite instabilities in the environment; then with tensions rising in the form of the Royal Coup in early 2005, a decision to ban the signing of inter-governmental contracts on new development cooperation projects, which caused the freezing down of the project. With improvements in the political situation of the country in early 2006, a decision was made to undo the ban on signing new contracts for development cooperation, which enabled starting the project up again and proceeding with preparations toward that end.

6.1 Enthusiastic project inception in a time of “practical peace”

A country agreement\textsuperscript{641} and consultancy contract\textsuperscript{642} for the project were signed in September 2006, and the nominated team leader Mr. Kari Leminen started work a month later, followed shortly thereafter by a core team consisting of a human resources development expert, and monitoring and evaluation expert, as well as a field specialist. In November 2006, at the time of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord by the Nepalese government and Maoist rebels, bringing a decade of Maoist insurgency to an end, a formal project kick-off was arranged together with the project’s Steering Committee. Former employees of the project described their sentiments in my discussions with them about the project’s beginnings:


First PSU employee: There was a tremendous enthusiasm at the beginning of the project! It was quite nice to work there then, as we had a familiar and good team with which we started. And... well, a real enthusiasm (smiles with what seems to be a sincere send of good, happy memories of the project).643

Second PSU employee: It was interesting in the sense that the beginning coincided with the practical peace, which had come just half a year earlier...

Me: What does practical peace mean?

Second PSU employee: Well, in the Spring of 2006 when the King was overthrown from power, and that’s kind of where the civil war … ended – although the peace agreement wasn’t made until after the project had already started… – … there wasn’t that kind of pressure which [was] experienced later in the [project, where] everyone tries to push [for their own interests]… Instead, everyone seemed to be in … a kind of positive mode, as peace had been achieved… and everyone was together – during that time even all of the political parties had been together in the movement to overthrow the King…

... later things have gone back to everyone just fighting each other over everything... and pushing every which way...

... but it was interesting in the very beginning when we went to the field – as ... the peace agreement hadn’t even been signed yet – often a group of Maoists would come up... when we went to the villages... and they would inquire in between the lines: who is this group of people coming and what’s going on? But there was never any threatening situation... maybe [due to] the fact that ... we thought that the development – was for all in any case. We probably emphasized the point that we are doing this for the poorest people in the most remote areas, ... that we are coming to improve their lives...644

643 Interview PSU [48] 2013.
644 Interview PSU [52] 2014.
6.1.1 Disruptions expected but implementation considered “realistically feasible”

Half a year into the beginning of the project, stock was taken – in the form of an Inception Report\textsuperscript{645} – of the working environment, security situation, activities carried out up until then, as well as the overall project status. Instead of formulating a separate security strategy, as had been stressed prior to the start up of the project by the Finnish Charge d’Affairs a.i., an “in depth assessment” of the risks and assumptions identified for the project was carried out as part of the report. The description of the working environment and security situation discussed the overall situation in Nepal on a national level after the signing of the Peace Agreement, pointing out steps in the peace process achieved as well as the unexpected developments of newly emerged political violence:

The Peace Agreement signed in December 2006 has ended the organized military struggle between the Maoist insurgents and the GON. The cantonment of the PLA army and the confinement of Nepal Army to barracks have been achieved and the arms registration for the cantoned troops under UN supervision was announced completed mid of February 2007. The issue of organizing security for the CPN-M leadership is still under discussion. Early March 2007, the Maoists troops began leaving the cantonment in search for “work” as living conditions in their cantonment got intolerable. They have returned to the cantonments, although the living conditions of the cantonments are still a major problem.

Since the violent incidents that started in Nepalgunj (late December 2006) between Madhesi (Terai people) and Pahadi (Hill people) the political violence has clearly taken a new unexpected shape. The protests have forced the GON to promise to revise the text of the Interim Constitution to satisfy the claims of the Madhesi movements. These promises did not diffuse the tension in Terai. The Madhesi movement has included some breakaway factions from the Maoists, who have been quick to term it a conspiracy hatched by the royalists and implemented by criminal elements. The recent incident in Gauri in Rautahat District, where 28 persons, mostly Maoists, were murdered by the Madhesi has brought also the lack of law and order and the inability of the Home Ministry to secure safety of the citizens to the

fore. This incident is seen as criminal rather than political and requires the state to have a close look at the law enforcement situation.646

Despite these incidents, the project’s inception report took note of the overall implementation context as having changed for the better, and concluded that the assumptions and risks had remained “very similar in nature and intensity” since the final formulation of the project. The most likely risks for the project envisaged in February 2007 were those concerning the elusive political stability and likelihood of sporadic violence remaining frequent, with a potential to escalate and spread widely. Moreover, temporary blockades due to strikes were suspected as delaying activities for the coming one to two years. Moreover, the devolution process was seen as having the potential of turning “into a very confusing situation as radical federalism becomes an emerging demand.”647 In conclusion the report stated:

Temporary disruptions [to the project] are to be expected. Elected local bodies may not materialize in the nearest years. Flexibility may be required on many elements including the beneficiaries’ contribution but the implementation looks realistically feasible in the whole project area.648

6.1.2 “Going into the unknown”

The security and risk assessment conducted as part of the Inception report recommended “taking into consideration the new political situation of Nepal as well as the context in which the project was being implemented.” 649 Contrary to this recommendation the first year of implementation did not seem to include any specific activities, which could be accounted for as explicitly considering the changed political realities nor the operational context in general. Only data available on water supply, sanitation, irrigation, rural energy facilities and other socio-economic information were reported as having been gathered during the so-called project orientation visits in the districts. According to the annual report, the range of project stakeholders had been informed during these visits about the project’s working approach, VDC selection processes, cost sharing patterns, roles

646 Ibid.
647 Final Project Inception Report, ii, 15, 16-17, 18.
648 Final Project Inception Report, 18.
649 Ibid. My italics.
and responsibilities of various stakeholders as well as the project budget. Participants to the orientation meetings were reported as having…

…expressed their views and made the project aware of the existing situation of respective districts especially on socio-economic situation, internal revenues of DDCs [District Development Committees] and situation of water resources sector development. 650

The way in which considering the new political situation and context was understood and dealt with in the project’s initial stage was explained to me in a discussion I had with a former employee of the project support unit:

Me: … you mentioned that it [the conflict] wasn’t given too much consideration … as there was – what did you call it again? – “Practical peace!” had been achieved. So, was there … open discussion about this, or was it more of an implicit understanding? I mean related to peace and conflict, was it defined [within the project] in some way what the situation was like in that regard?

PSU employee: Oh, you mean like what the project’s role in it would be, or..?

Me: Well, rather the thinking on it [the situation] in general … was this “practical peace” discussed or analyzed some how, or was it more in between the lines?

(lengthy silence)

Or was it more like: the conflict is now a thing of the past?

PSU employee: Well probably in the way that … the point of departure for [the project’s] work was that the core group of the project’s implementation team, who came from the Lumbini project, had worked most of [the conflict’s] duration in a similar project during the conflict… I believe they had really good knowledge and know-how of how it is possible to function [during conflict]… At least there was no fear – although the conflict was still going on – that it would completely endanger the work, because those people had personal experience of long-term functioning in an actual war-situation. … Of course there was also the sentiment that since peace had been achieved… the fact that the whole political and a fairly broad citizens’ movement was behind it… probably it wasn’t felt that there would have been an immediate danger of [the country] going back to war…

650 Annual Report, Financial Year 1, UM 93.20 NEP, Nepal: Maasendun vesi- ja sanaaatiohanke 5.
Me: “it wasn’t felt”? I want to grab on to that expression; it’s a bit passive? ... I guess what I’m trying to get at here, is that conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm –type thinking usually emphasizes the importance of [actively acquiring] in-depth understanding of the local context in order to avoid unintentionally exacerbating tensions or creating new ones... But so, was it just that you went in with a kind of common sense approach and the wisdom of [the Lumbini] experience, or – ?

PSU employee: Well (nodding), probably it was just like that, and then in that [approach] there was an attempt to be particularly neutral... and... to go by the principles that had been created for where [we were] going.

... But there wasn’t any real – probably we could have placed more emphasis on thinking about ensuring that we don’t cause anything or that we don’t end up being on any one side – cause I’m sure there are different kinds of groupings everywhere. That we would know how to act in the situation precisely in the way, that we come out as neutral and that we are able to operate tactfully in the situation. [Because] it was, ... after all, even for these knowledgeable Nepali[ staff members]..., who had project experience from that other [conflict] area, ... it was a completely new place for them too.

It was interesting, when we went ... for the first time... from one District to another and held these meetings... where we introduced what this project is and what it was that we were coming to do. And then a kind of contract was signed between the District and the project, that we’ll be doing this together – so when we were walking up to Bajura, where there was no road, and no one had found out beforehand how long it takes [to travel] from one place to the next and how [which route] one should move along. It was just, they asked around and it always took until night time, ... we were supposedly going to a specific place for the night, but then when you asked the locals how long it takes, they always said “half an hour,” although it took us like two or three hours (chuckles, as if to relay a sense of irony).

Me: Well yeah, yeah (laughing), their walking pace is maybe a bit different!

PSU employee: It was somehow awfully – it really felt like, that we were just going into the unknown – the whole crew. So in that sense it would maybe have been good to talk a bit more about, you know – But then it went with good common, – horse sense, and with good luck. So it was just so – somehow it just stuck with me, that they [the Nepali staff members] hadn’t ever been there either, and they didn’t know the context at all. Bajura was, ... one of these places where there wasn’t a road yet – really remote places... so we just kept treading on. It was a bit interesting for me too – and a bit nerve
wrecking, when you realize that these, our so-called locals don’t know any better [than you do] and don’t have a clue about this place (laughs). Of course, they do know the language...651

Similar points were brought up in my meeting with two representatives from the Finnish Embassy.652 They spoke about the importance of really knowing the operational context when working in a conflict-affected area, and made a case for it being equally important for both foreign and local staff. They also pointed out that they felt it was wrong to assume that if someone is Nepali, that they would automatically or instinctively have a good enough grasp of the reality on the ground in each of the communities that the project was going to work in:

Embassy employee: First the context. When people come to – you know, as sent from Finland, or coming into development projects, they usually don’t know the context. And so the thinking is often short-term... Okay, the projects are vision[ed] to be four years, like this one. And then maybe a continuation...So in four years you need to get all these things done. Same with the people being sent to the Embassy, you know, you are sent for three to four years, so people tend to see the world in a very compact form: three to four years that things need to be sorted out in [that] period of time. And...they don’t see the forest from the trees.

Me: Uhum? And you see that as –?

Embassy employee: a structural impediment.

Me: Yeah. An impediment. And unrealistic?

Embassy employee: Totally unrealistic, of course! And an impediment in that we don’t see...where the country has come to this point. And how so small part of history it is.

... So understanding the context, and of course then...the Nepali people in this case: they know the history and they know the context. But [the Finns] also need to know it. Because it is the foreigners who make the decisions, based on advice of course, but the decisions are not always necessarily even made here [in Kathmandu], but they are made in Helsinki. So really understanding the context well [is crucial]. And not trying to move too fast. And really know the actors in a conflict – or post-conflict [situation] – what ever the situation is. So the – your projects or programs or any actions don’t

651 Interview PSU [52] 2014.
increase the problems. [But] you cannot stop them from increasing conflict if you don’t understand the context. So that is really the basic thing: that you have the information and the analysis, …reliable analysis on who are the actors and which direction they are moving [in]. So you have to be very sensitive in that way, and not just “oh, we've done this this way already before and it works.”

... 

Me: What about you? (Asking second Embassy employee for reflection.)

Second Embassy employee: …certainly also for [Nepalis], I mean the changing situation – things like, change over time…society might not be, but the political situation is so fragile here. Where ever you go, in the village[s]…for planning for the programming and the project…we have to go through the District level…so it’s very difficult even for [Nepalis] to know what is really going to be disturbing [or feasible] or practical [in each setting]…. It’s very…we have to have …much of far-sightedness. Who are the target[s]? It is very important to know. And within the target also, certainly, we have to now look into, are we looking into the hill people, the mountain people, Terrai people. And within that also, then you have to go into the detail: what are the actors that are really going to be playing an important role…

... So – for [Nepalis] also, it’s very difficult to understand the context. In that case its very important that we go into that particular area and then only design accordingly.

Me: Yeah, okay. So I’m hearing from both of you that you find this contextual understanding of ultimate importance?

Both Embassy employees together: Yes, yes.

Second Embassy employee: Because we are in the post-conflict situation. We are not yet settled. The situation is so fragile. We don’t know yet. [It] depends again when we design for the DDC level, or for the VDC level.. I mean administrative structures. We have to really understand. And now, if we are planning, I mean if we don’t know…what kind of decentralization we are going to have…we don’t know yet. Its very difficult, it’s very difficult. I mean we are in transition.

First Embassy employee: Another thing I think is important in this current context – and perhaps in every context, is that we are talking about the actors in a community, in a society. But [at the same time] we are also talking about the [ongoing] huge social change. The traditional actors are not the only actors any more. There are new ones popping up!
Me: What kind of new ones?

First Embassy employee: Meaning those people who never had voice before. It’s the Dalits, it’s the women, it’s the different ethnic groups, different third gender groups, old people, disabled people.

Me: What is this a result of? Why are they popping up now?

First Embassy employee: …My analysis is that it’s the result of the conflict. When historically these people didn’t have the right … or had limited right… and the conflict, the Maoists drove this sort of rights-based agenda. That everybody has the right to dignified life and has the right to education and work and right to their ethnicity and right to their language…and so they got a lot of support from all these people who didn’t have this right [before].

6.1.3 Familiarity vs. the unknown: was comparison to Lumbini justified?

Some of my research participants reflected upon the validity of comparing the project’s operational context in the Far West to that of the project that had been carried out earlier in Lumbini. The project was largely based on the idea of replicating the past Lumbini project, but once it started the staff found the operational context, in fact, to be quite different in the Far West:

PSU employee: … there are many leader[s]…nobody listens to advice [of one leader trusted by all]. It is very difficult. So that’s one reason why in the Far Western region [it is]…more challenging, of course.

… and especially [there are] less educated people [in the Far West than in the Lumbini area]. People who are already educated…, are not in the village [they have] gone for the better opportunity… Only having people who cannot go outside [leave the area], children, women – …maybe, you know they even have not enough food… So compared with Lumbini and this project; really, we cannot compare – the Western region and the Far West.

… [also] the Lumbini project did a lot… in that area…So people knew about Finnida\(^{653}\) [there]. But in the Far West it’s quite new, they [the people] do

\(^{653}\) The name Finnida is widely used by the research participants of this study to refer to past and even current Finnish development cooperation as an agency. The term is not, however an official name for Finnish development cooperation and its use has been discontinued from the MFA side since the 1990s. E-mail correspondence MFA Archives 2.4.2015 and MFA Communications 2.4.2015.
not know what Finnida is…what is the policy of Finnida, what is the modality of this project; so its quite different. You know, working 15 years is quite different!654

In our discussion about the importance of contextual understanding one of the persons working at the Finnish Embassy also commented on this in response to my question about this project being a replication of the Lumbini program:

Me: Have you heard of the term “replication project” with regard to this project? … I was just thinking that in a way in the notion of a replication project, it’s kind of – there’s an idea that “this is a practice that we have come up with and it’s … good practice, and thus we will just implement it [here too]. It’s somehow…implicitly, there might be a danger –

Embassy employee: (Interrupting) I see a danger too! But some people don’t see the danger… But yes, this is exactly what I mean: that when the projects were implemented in the West [in Lumbini], Nepal was different. Totally different. The dynamics also, the political dynamics were totally different. And I try to also say that that’s why we cannot simply replicate. We have to change the approach to fit the current [and local] context. 655

6.2 Links between peace and development?

As part of its Inception report, the project had voiced its support to and respect for the inclusive, broad-based national priorities of the Interim Government. The project claimed to “link the peace with the development project in order to prevent future conflicts.” What this meant in practice was undefined in the project documentation. Left wondering about this, I tried to find signs of how the linking of peace and development might have been handled within the project during its first year from the rest of my document dataset – but to no avail. From a conversation with one of my research participants, I learned that the link between this development project and “peace” did not seem to have been given much (or any) thought explicitly. We were discussing the project’s interactions with the context more broadly, aside from it’s defined goals related to water resources and sanitation systems, when this former project support unit staff member exclaimed:

...of course... that is a really good way of thinking! Precisely the point that quite often in projects you start out from [the premise] that the project’s impact is only [on] that which is aimed for, and we might forget those other effects, which there may actually be quite a few of – the kinds that one is unaware of... ... [P]robably the[ ]...broader... impacts [of this project] are more unintentional, or maybe such that they are caused on the second degree by what has been done. ... its the goals on the lower level, which are concrete: ... we constructed something like this – people get water service. But then what happens after that in society – that is seldom... thought about [at all] or is even possible to think about beforehand... and this type of ex post evaluations of these projects are regrettably few, which is a real pity as such. So its up to individual researchers to try to figure out, say after five years, what have then been the effects, or what they have led to. But I’m sure that whatever development is done, that it does change the whole social dynamics in that area, which in turn can in the long run affect all kinds of things... which of course hopefully are mostly positive, but there’s often other [kinds of effects] too.657

It was as if during our conversation – six years after his tenure in the project – this person experienced a kind of personal eureka moment, where he started to envision the possibility and potential of taking into consideration the link between infrastructural development projects and the building of peace.

Another research participant from the project support unit spoke of the Lumbini project’s658 legacy in bringing certain principles of working to this project, which served to link peace and development:

PSU employee: Finnida had a strong name here at the time – as it still does (chuckles, seemingly proud of this matter of affairs). Other’s vehicles were burned, except those that had a big Finnida sign on them, ha-ha-ha (laughs, conveying a sense of irony?) – so we continued work throughout [the conflict time in Lumbini]... its from those times [and the Lumbini project] that we got certain principles that we followed in the Far West [this project] too. In other words, in thinking of different kinds of approaches to conflict, one of them is that you work precisely with the causes from which the conflict started in the first place. This goes a bit into the post-conflict – or when the active phase [of conflict] isn’t on anymore, but the causes are still there. When there’s a possibility that the conflict ... would flare up again. So

657 Interview PSU [52] 2014.
658 The Lumbini project refers in this dissertation to the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Support Programme (RWSSSP) conducted in the Lumbini Zone and financed by the Government of Finland since 1989 and completed in 2006.
in those kinds of things I would say that the project continues to have an impact here. ... it [the conflict] started from the Far West and Mid West Karnali exactly because those areas hadn’t been included [into the development project]. They hadn’t been listened to. Never had it been forgotten to collect taxes from them, but very little of anything went there in return. And that shows still today, actually.

Me: Mm?

PSU employee: But so when we were active in the Lumbini area... and the reason that our cars or offices were never burned or destroyed, and we weren’t even actually threatened – according to the project document…we weren’t working directly on the conflict [just like in this project] – but it just so happened that the issues that we were working on were actively related to the causes of conflict…which is linked to… equal participation and to the opportunity for all to participate and gain from these kinds of common goods, or to participate in decision-making. Or to decide about the budget or to decide about planning and all these kinds of things – these were at the background of the conflict. And because also the money in these bilateral projects goes directly to the villages… as it did in [this project] in the Far West too, the money – budgets, I mean the construction budgets go to the user committees… that was somehow the key to being able to continue work there [in the midst of the conflict]. Both of the conflict parties appreciated this transparency on the village level.659

Two of my research participants from the Nepali administration also spoke about the project’s potential effects on the broader peacebuilding in Nepal through its contribution to income generating activities. On the other hand they made note of the potential of the project to create new forms of conflict:

MLD official 1: ...let me say that income generation is there...at least half a million Nepali rupees will go in the investment. That also creates some possibility for employment, isn’t it? And that will also help for the peacebuilding – it has a role to play.

Me: How? Explain a bit more!

MLD official 1: Because they will have some income generation now, you know – why the conflict? Because some are having and some are not having – that is the conflict! Why this situation has emerged? Because some are

659 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
getting more facility and some people are not getting. I think to some extent it [the project] will fill up the gap.

Me: Make the gap a little bit smaller?

MLD official 1: Yeah, of course! Some condition is there of course, I don’t say that [all] contribution, but some contribution.

Me: Yes, and of course, its not the main objective of this project, but it could do –

MLD official 1: (interrupts) Exactly, it does, it does! Around half a billion of money is going to be invested in these activities – it means some employment will be generated, and that will help in some way.

Me: Do you agree? (Asking other MLD official) Do you have anything to add?

MLD official 2: Yes, of course. It certainly helps peacebuilding – but I have – some corner, in some way it may generate conflict also.

Me: How?

MLD official 2: Because the project is running in 80 VDCs out of 400 VDCs in ten districts. If [a] district gets [one] VDC that is benefitted, then the other VDCs certainly … couldn’t get such facilities such as water supply schemes, electrifications, irrigation – there may be conflict.

Me: Because only a small percentage of the 400 VDCs are getting something? So that can create conflict?

MLD official 2: Yes. These [project] VDCs – … are scattered. Here one, here one, here (drawing an imaginary picture in the air, pointing left and right) – many VDCs in between are not getting.\footnote{Interview MLD [5] 2008.}

\subsection{Conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding: fuzzy crosscutting issues}

The Inception report from the project’s beginning stated a set of crosscutting issues related to the question about links between peace and development. Included in these was “conflict sensitivity and
As before, there was no elaboration in the report on the closer content of any of these crosscutting issues, nor how they were going to be implemented during the course of the project. Having found the term conflict sensitivity in the project documentation, if the opportunity rose, I often asked about it directly during discussions I had with people working with the project. Through these conversations I learned that there was no strong and common, explicitly defined understanding related to conflict sensitivity within the project. While some of my research discussants gave me a blank look in response to my queries about the notion of conflict sensitivity, others revealed their understanding of it being somehow related to the Basic Operational Guidelines, the themes of gender and social inclusion as well as the way in which project people themselves acted in their work:

Me: …does this notion of conflict sensitivity say anything to you? Or how do you understand it? Does it direct your work and if so, how do you use it?

Consultant: (looks at me with confused expression in silence)

PSU employee: Umm – well, that exact term hasn’t been used here, but the BOGs [Basic Operational Guidelines] are talked about everywhere here, which is in a way related to that…

…it [the BOG] has these very crude main rules of the game of how we operate here. How we are specifically neutral and equal. And that we need to try and get the trust of both sides [of the conflict] on our side, or at least neutrality, independence… So those rules, at least, should be known by everyone. But what is conflict sensitivity – is that included [in the BOGs] or is it a broader thing?

Consultant: Do you mean with this BOG that which the European Union published here… for countries working here… weren’t those the instructions that we followed here earlier already?

PSU employee: Yes, it is… but it’s not just the EU, …there are several donors in it… but it has these basic principles: neutrality – and actually transparency is there too. So all these basic concepts of good donor activity are there. But if you just read it, you don’t necessarily know what you should do next.

661 The other crosscutting issues defined in the Inception report were poverty reduction; social inclusion and gender; good governance, democracy and decentralization; as well as protection and conservation of environment. My italics.
Me: Yeah, they are maybe somewhat abstract – they don’t give operative guidance?

PSU employee: Yes, but you can always refer to them…(chuckles, conveying irony) [But] (seriously) – if it’s in the car and you run into a Maoist patrol somewhere at the end of a road, it won’t necessarily help you very much if they read the paper.

… But the only thing that we, our people emphasize, is that you must be neutral, that you need to …talk with all people, and that you shouldn’t reveal political color… [and] if you do have an opinion about things, it should not show at work. Because it’s precisely that, that heats up emotions. But of course, this is related to gender and inclusion…to our… building of peace – so if we don’t give a bad example…if our Brahmin [employees] and others don’t give the example of eating together at the same table with Dalits, no one will listen to what we try to teach [in the project] either. This is something that we try to internalize here all the time – we don’t have any Dalit [staff working for us] here right now, but in any case we do have these lower caste people cooking for us (laughs cautiously). I mean it’s a matter of principle for us, that all our people are able to eat that food.

…

Me: So but do you keep this on the fore, do you talk about this? I mean, do you “let the cat out of the bag,” in these words, by telling your people before they go to the field that “this is the project’s approach”?

PSU employee: No, we haven’t …in so much detail, but it could be a good thing…to talk about this in our next… We have this gender and inclusion study going on, so it’ll be interesting to see what comes out of it…to see what arises from it to our practical work. And in this connection then [to add] these kinds of practical, concrete instructions for … all our work.662

In otherwise generally amiable and up-beat research interview situations, bringing up the notion of conflict sensitivity as a specific concept in our conversations sometimes ended up resulting in a feeling of uneasiness for both the person I was talking to as well as me personally:

Me: [At the end of a longer discussion:] I wanted to still ask you about the notion of conflict sensitivity.

PSU employee: In this project?

Me: Yeah, or in general too. Have you heard of the idea of conflict sensitive development?

PSU employee: (long silence) – I haven’t – (laughs nervously, quietly, as if slightly embarrassed)

Me: Or maybe you’ve heard of the Do No Harm approach?

PSU employee: This, our – (lengthy pause) our project, or –?

Me: In general. Have you ever heard of conflict sensitivity? – Or of the Do No Harm approach?

PSU employee: (very silently) No, I have no – (silence)663

These mildly uncomfortable situations came up more than once in the research process, making it clear to me that the term conflict sensitivity was indeed not perceived as belonging to the project’s vocabulary. This was confirmed also in a discussion I had with project stakeholders from the Nepali administration:

Me: One final question that I have in mind...[concerns] this notion of conflict sensitivity – what do you understand with this, or have you used it?

MLD official 1: I have heard about it. But in terms of the RVWRMP [project] I cannot see this – we are not anywhere it has been subjected, or analyzed in such a way – I don’t see that. I don’t know.

Me: How about you? (Asking other official)

MLD official 2: Conflict sensitivity?

Me: (Nodding) – being sensitive to conflict.

MLD official 1: (Explains something quickly to his colleague in Nepali) – I don’t know, it has not been analyzed, I think – in our project. Do you think that?

Me: I’ll tell you in a moment (smiling, wanting to hear official # 2’s response)

MLD official 2: I also don’t know about this project, but about conflict sensitivity – in our country in remote place[s] like these project districts – most of the people in the project districts are innocent. They don’t know

663 Interview PSU [7] 2008. Later in the discussion I explained to this research participant why I was asking about conflict sensitivity and how it is commonly defined.
their rights, and they are innocent and they haven’t the sense of conflict – by innocence...they are uneducated, they [have] not see the outside world.

...

MLD official 1: Yes, but nowadays this concept [of conflict sensitivity] is emerging.

R: Yes, it seems to be coming up, and that’s sort of where I got started with my research... 664

The employees of the Finnish Embassy with whom I spoke, in turn, seemed to have adopted a somewhat more explicit understanding of the notion of conflict sensitivity. I gained perspective of this during a longer conversation665 we engaged in about development projects in conflict-affected contexts. One of the Embassy employees had been explaining to me at length about the background of the past conflict in Nepal, and offering advice on how to conduct field research in Achham, when she abruptly started to talk about conflict sensitivity:

So, about th[e] conflict sensitive approach...So if you understand the context, and if you understand the conflicts, the wider political conflicts, and societal conflicts and village level conflicts, and then of course we can also go to the household conflicts...You devise a project that will minimize – Do No Harm principle, you know: minimize the conflict?

Later in our conversation I returned to the topic of conflict sensitivity:

Me: Okay... You already brought up the concept of conflict sensitivity. How do you understand that? How do you use that in your work? With regard to – in general – to development projects? And ... also to specifically this project?

Second Embassy employee: Umm – what I see is like – first of all we need to know... depending on where we are going to work, we are working in communities, at the grass root levels. We are working for them. These are, I mean DDCs, NGOs are just the mechanism to reach them, the means to reach them. First of all we have to have a kind of awareness raising also, about the conflict. We are even at that stage. At the national level we talk of

664 Interview MLD [5] 2008. Toward the end of this conversation I ended up explaining to these research participants how conflict sensitivity is thought of as being linked to the Do No Harm principle, which they had heard and spoken of earlier during our discussion.

the sensitive, but awareness raising itself also is important in some parts of the country. And sensitivity: that is how we start to work. And ultimately we’ll be having a kind of response in raising the voices, for instance, of those voiceless people.

Me: Uhum?

Second Embassy employee: Conflict as a whole and conflict on the society level also, I mean we cannot separate, its very difficult. I mean water conflict, political conflict…where ever we go. So that awareness – and then sensitive and then responsiveness of those people who are getting the benefits. They are the one to demand, what is their need. They have to reflect…

…So conflict sensitivity – and then: what are the effects on the families…

Because (asking her colleague) if you can remember … we were in this Maoist cantonment last time, and I was talking to one of the girls…I mean they were married on their way when they became part of the Maoists. So now they don’t have the guts to go back to their home also… it’s some kind of cycle, no? [The] conflict [is] going on, whether I did right or wrong. I mean, sooo many, so many things to peace. I have a peace of mind, I mean peace in the country is one thing, but individually also, it’s so important to get to know.

Me: So are you talking…about the need for … conflict sensitivity from the individual to the project level?

Second Embassy employee: Yeah.

Me: And what about you? (Asking other Embassy employee for her reflections.) How do you understand conflict sensitivity? And how do you use it in your work?

First Embassy employee: Well, I look at it first, you know…like I said earlier, understanding the context, understanding that the actors… understanding the societal things this country is going through. Understanding those who need more support than others. And then – the project to be needs based – and… at the same time rights-based. But when we are talking about infrastructure, I guess both of these apply.

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666 Former Maoist fighters of the Maoist People’s Liberation Army (PLA) resided in cantonments prior to their being integrated into the Nepalese army in 2012. Prashant Jha, "One Country Two Armies’ Situation Ends in Nepal," The Hindu October 2, 2012.
Earlier in the conversation when her colleague had spoken about devising a project that would minimize conflict, I had asked whether they saw this as happening with regard to this project. This opened up a discussion about the reality of trying to implement the notion of conflict sensitivity, bringing up the importance of staff attitude and commitment to the notion, as well as the need for continuous training of all staff members on the topic, amongst other things:

First Embassy employee: …[T]his Far West project… has been very close to my heart from the very beginning – and a very concrete task for me. So I have worked very closely with Kari Leminen [the team leader of the project] to make the project as sensitive, as conflict sensitive [as possible], which in today’s context…inclusion is a very important part of this conflict sensitivity. Not leaving anybody outside, rather bringing them in. Although, that might create some conflict, because you are changing the old patterns. But our role is not to hold up the old societal systems, but our role is to support positive change. So – that…I have seen this as my role. As supporting the project and advising them in how, what things are important and what should be taken into consideration. And Kari has been absolutely fantastic – he’s very open, and it’s been very easy to work with him on these issues. Yeah, he’s not [just] a hardcore engineer, he’s the soft engineer who understands the soft issues of project implementation [too]!

Me: So am I hearing [you correctly] that you are saying … in a sense that the way in which the implementing actors – where Kari Leminen for instance is the team leader of the team of implementing actors – that their attitude is important in trying to –?

First Embassy employee: (Interrupting) It makes it easier, certainly! I don’t know how much more work it would have been had the team leader been not so willing to look at these issues. But – I think it’s possible.

Me: Well, in a sense they are gatekeepers? I mean the ones who are … making the decision to do …things in this way or another?

First Embassy employee: Exactly! But [we] have seen this as [our] role here…at the Embassy [to motivate the project on this].

Despite seeing it as their role to support the project in being conflict sensitive, the Embassy employees expressed their concern as to their limited possibilities to provide sufficient support to the project:

Me: So how is your work going then with regard to the Far Western project? And these ideals of how things should be going, which you’ve been [describing]? For example with this conflict sensitive approach?
First Embassy employee: Okay, my challenge is that I don’t get there [into the field] enough. And that’s [an] organizational challenge.

Me: Uhum? …So you feel like you would be able to contribute more if you were able to be present more … on the micro-level [of the project work]?

First Embassy employee: Yes, exactly! But I think on the macro-level, or project level…the project has been very good in taking into consideration these issues.

Me: Yes, it’s [written] into the project documents. [From what] I’ve been reading so far, you see those important key words there. But then of course it’s one thing to write something beautiful in a project document and another to actually make it happen?

First Embassy employee: So if you read the inception report…there’s a huge leap into…what they are following now…I think it gives you an idea of what changes have been made [from the original project document]. And what track they are on in this regard. And sure, they have challenges: when the social mobilizers are – you know they are selecting Dalit women, you know that is a huge challenge to the village… There was [a] lot of struggle in a couple of the villages.

Me: How did that fold out?

First Embassy employee: Well, my advice was…that they should have two [social mobilizers] in each [village]. So they would have one Dalit woman in each one… I said… even …you might need to have a even a third one, that they also learn to work together, the different castes. So not to give up, not to say: “okay, we cannot have Dalit women social mobilizers in this VDC because the village [doesn’t] accept it.”

Me: So you are saying that the project has taken upon [itself] a fairly tough challenge in that they are…attempting to change the structures of the ways that things have been done originally – and that that is creating some challenges along the way?

First Embassy employee: Yes.

Despite making note of shortcomings in their possibilities to support the project in a conflict sensitive approach, the Embassy employees also saw the potential of something good coming out of conflicts within/caused by the project:

Me: What would your analysis be so far – do you think they are on the right track? … I think – the way I’m understanding this –[is that] it’s also a
question of personalities; of who happens to be there…personal dynamics, to a large extent?

First Embassy employee: I think it’s much more that that. I think it’s the stratification first, and then in the end – if the project maintains the [approach] then it’s the personal dynamics. But I’m sure that this has created some conflict. But it’s the kind of conflict that breeds change.

Me: Yeah? Like in the perception that conflict is different from violence?

First Embassy employee: Yes – positive conflict.

In addition to expert support, this Embassy employee identified the need for project policies and staff training (as well as unlearning cultural conventions) to ensure conflict sensitivity:

First Embassy employee: … there needs to be a policy for the project, the projects need to have a policy, to implement this understanding of the country context [and inclusion]. And to implement it, you have to train your staff properly. Train yourself and your staff in these issues.

Me: In the issues that you’ve mentioned [earlier]? The understanding of context, actors and –?

First Embassy employee: (Interrupting) Yes, the conflict sensitivity! What does it mean in the area where you work? What does inclusion mean in Achham, what does it mean in Bajhang… And so you have to train and re-train the staff, so that they internalize. Because most of the staff is higher caste, and have treated the Dalits the way in which everyone else has treated them.

Me: It’s part of their culture?

First Embassy employee: Right. So they have to re-train themselves, even the trainers have to train themselves. So I see that as a major challenge to the project. And who ever is in charge of these issues has to be very vigilant and strict that it’s followed. And still at the same time open to see, you know, what else is there. So, there needs to be both openness and strictness in … implementing your policies.

Me: You spoke earlier about the need to be careful not to create new tensions through the project. Do you see that as part of this picture?

First Embassy employee: Yes. For example the availability of water to one village and not to the other. Because the project is not working in every VDC. So – (pausing)
Me: So that it’s not creating new forms of exclusion by providing resources to some VDCs but not to others?

First Embassy employee: Yeah, and you have to look at also the infrastructure context. You know, the water resource… Where do they come from and how it’s distributed.

6.2.2 Do No Harm compass missing – “…[but] working in conflict comes from the back of one’s mind really”

Related to the point about linking peace with development discussed above, a further commitment was voiced in the Inception report with regard to ensuring that the project would work in the interest of the peace process, respecting Do No Harm principles and complying with values and norms expressed in the Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs). How this would be carried out, was pointed to only implicitly, without clearly establishing a link between the project’s work and the said principles and guidelines. Rather, it was stated in the report that the project would make sure that poor and discriminated groups would benefit from basic services and public investments in a non-discriminatory way. Moreover, the report declared that the project would promote inclusion and actual power sharing in community based organizations and NGOs in line with the Finnish government’s policy for cooperation with Nepal. Finally, in light of the latest developments in the rules and regulations of the government of Nepal, a need was identified for a “critical review of project policies, approach and implementation modality.” The implementation guidelines, the report concluded, would be based on guidelines and procedures developed and used in a former Finnish water program (RWSSSP) in the Lumbini zone, “with adequate modification to comply with [the] changed political and social context…”667 I inquired directly about this from several of my research participants. One conversation during my visit to the project support unit in 2008 went along the following lines:

Me: I read in the Inception report [where] …it is stated elegantly there that this project is going to use th[e] Do No Harm approach.

PSU employee: Yeah, right! (laughs out, seeming slightly abashed)

Me: What does it mean?
PSU employee: Gee, you caught me – I have to confess that I don’t know yet, cause… well I do know that Do No Harm means that you shouldn’t do anything bad – like for an administrative person: if you don’t do anything, then you won’t do any harm either. ha-ha-ha (laughs, joking). But (with serious face) this has bothered me: that we’ve written it in – it’s even in bold letters there! And of course it has to be one of our important –

Me: (interrupting) I guess I would probably have found it even in the footnotes (chuckling, attempting to ease any sense of pressure or blame)

PSU employee: Yeah, yeah… but it is related so strongly to the bigger picture. And Helvetas just had this training session on Do No Harm a few weeks ago, a two or three day [event]. And I couldn’t find anyone to send – it was in Nepali, so I couldn’t go myself. Finally Sunil agreed to go, our [national project] coordinator, but he got stuck in Terai, due to a strike. So he couldn’t go… [The idea was] that he would have then held a briefing for us. … When they sent papers [from the training], I noticed that there was a certain terminology for how to identify certain things. And I thought: we really need to start studying this. But it died now – this opportunity went… but we need to arrange to take these people –

Me: So could one say that it [Do No Harm] is on your conceptual map, but you don’t have a very strong sense of what it could be…?

PSU employee: Yeah, we don’t have any kind of … we don’t have that compass, that [could tell us] … what it means.

Consultant: Was it Helvetas that arranged the course, or?

PSU employee: Yes, Helvetas arranges these annually, or a couple of times a year… and I begged [them] for two spots in the course, and it was terribly embarrassing when no one from our project went there. (Chuckles uneasily)

Consultant: Well, that was a really unfortunate situation. 668

I came back to this question in another conversation five years later, with one of the same PSU employees with whom I had had this discussion above during my visit to the project in Nepal:

Me: … Let’s go back for a moment to what you said about the idea you had about arranging some kind of Do No Harm -training for the project. I remember, that in 2008 you told me that … what had happened in the end,

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was that no one [from the project] had been able to attend... And I recall that you were really positive about my coming [to visit the project to do research on these themes] because ... “if someone is looking at this perspective, maybe it will provoke thinking [within the project]...” And based on that you also asked me to share my preliminary observations at the [project’s] coordination meeting before I left back for Finland. And then we even planned this small group discussion on [those themes] with the idea that it might evoke some thoughts.

PSU employee: Mm, – mm?

Me: But so, ultimately, you had the feeling that it just remained on that level of thought? Or do you think – did anything stick with you or the others from it [my visit]?

PSU employee: Yeah, I dunno – (ponders in silence)

Me: Or were you just so busy [as you said before], and thinking about the primary goals [of the project]?

PSU employee: Yeah, there was indeed the idea that we would send one or two employees to this kind of training and that ... this person would then maybe have become a trainer for us. Now that I think about it in more detail. But in any case, it was one kind of impulse, that we sort of discussed it [with you]. But I can’t [recall] ... that something would have followed from it. Or that...it’s so hard to measure those kinds of impacts.

But all right, indeed, as you said, the key crew had been there in Lumbini, where it was in the middle of the conflict. And they were like: they knew how carefully you had to operate and to be sensitive. And the rest of our ‘band’ [team], they too had been working here and there, where conflicts had been going on. ...[So] in a sense it is from here – [you know] ... it comes from the back of one’s mind really.669

As the Do No Harm principle had been so explicitly written into the project documents I decided to inquire about it directly in my discussions with various other project stakeholders as well, just as I had done in reference to the notion of conflict sensitivity. Whereas my questions about conflict sensitivity were quite often received with blank looks, the phrase “do no harm” seemed to be somewhat more familiar among my research participants. When I asked a government official working in Achham district whether he had heard about the Do No Harm principle and if so,
what it meant to him, he responded: “it means that development actors should concentrate on their development activities only. There should be no involvement in politics, no taking sides.” The same understanding of Do No Harm as remaining neutral was voiced also by an MLD official, who claimed that it meant “not politicizing...meaning politically not aligned, remaining neutral...that is the main principle of the word [Do no harm]”

More often than not, the people I spoke with seemed to have at most a vague or sometimes even non-existent understanding of what was meant by Do No Harm as a specific term in the project documents. A typical conversation about Do No Harm would go along the following lines:

Me: Okay, what about the Do No Harm principle? ...Was it discussed [during the project]...?
Mangalsen office employee: I do not know about this Do Not Harm principle.
Me: Have you never heard of it?
Mangalsen office employee: No.

This did not mean, however, that the content behind the specific terminology would have been completely foreign to the people I talked to. For example when I explained to this research participant (above) what Do No Harm usually refers to (as an approach with which to ensure conflict sensitivity), I learned that it was more the concept as such that was unfamiliar than what was meant by it:

Me: Do No Harm usually refers to a method / principle with which it is possible to plan and implement aid work in a way that supports peacebuilding in conflict affected areas and also avoids causing any further harm or creating new tensions...
Mangalsen office employee: Oh – I think we unknowingly applied the principle... Our maximum effort is to provide facilities...[equally] to all people or users in the VDC... Then no people will create tension...Whenever there is no biasness then no tension and no conflict.
Me: So [your understanding is that] unbiased and equity based provision of aid ensures ‘doing no harm’?

Mangalsen office employee: Yes.672

One of my research participants provided a definition for the phrase “do no harm” as part of an explanation for why it had been integrated into the project in the first place, and why it had not been actively used in the project:

PSU employee: …[I]t’s related for example to these GESI-strategies673 and a certain kind of sensitivity to situations. That at least we wouldn’t increase the conflict; and related to that is transparency and all of that… so that what ever we do, that it in minimum wouldn’t increase (chuckles) what is going on there, or what was going on.674

6.2.3 Conflict felt to be “over in a way” – low priority on conflict themes

As explained earlier in this narrative concerning the design phase of the project, the planning and security mission carried out in 2004 had recommended for all expatriate and local staff of the project to complete a course in conflict training before they were deployed. Moreover, the mission had suggested that the staff be obligated to adhere to such trainings, and that relevant guidelines should form part of their contracts. The aim of such training, it was then defined, would be for the staff to succeed in “maintaining a neutral attitude towards the conflicting parties.”675

The themes of dispute resolution, mediation skills, and conflict management were mentioned in the documentation concerning the first year of the project as course contents in just two reports676 on a basic training course format arranged for social/community mobilizers:677 “The general objective of these training(s) was to orient and sensitize the participants in the field of social mobilization so that

672 Interview Mangalsen office [53] 2014.
673 GESI refers to the project’s gender and social inclusion guideline and strategy of the project.
674 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
675 Mission Report, 9.11.2004, UM 93.20 NEP.
677 The terms social mobilizer and community mobilizer are used interchangeably in the research data. Both refer to central actors in the project implementation, whose task was to raise the awareness of the communities about the project, its purpose and working modalities; and to mobilize community action in carrying out the project.
A member of the project support unit (PSU) staff responsible for the design of these trainings explained to me that one to two sessions were held on the themes of conflict management and dispute resolution as part of the seven-day training. He further described the purpose of these sessions as a way to offer the social mobilizers guidance on how to handle situations in which disputes or disagreements would arise during project implementation. The conflict management sessions were carried out through practical exercises and their objective was to teach how to identify what disputes were about and then to help to solve them:

So how we facilitated them [the trainings] was – first, you identify the dispute, and the reasons behind this. And write in your notebook…separately with both parties, like this. And then you hold a meeting with them. And then verify the reasons. Is it true? That’s why the dispute came? So if somebody tells a lie, this thing will be discussed among them [the parties of the dispute]. But be positive. You don’t take the side of anybody, because you are the mediator. You tell the real thing happening there. And like this – some of them [the Community Mobilizers] became confident how to solve …conflict[s], by …this process. But mainly we talk[ed] about how disputes arise and what is the effect of the disputes, and how [they can be] converted into disasters. From the small, toward deep[er] things. So, it was one to two sessions only.

Apart from this, there was no mention in the project documentation of the first year of any training or capacity building related to conflict themes (management, prevention, resolution, sensitivity) for the rest of the project staff and/or stakeholders. This finding was confirmed to me in my communications with other employees of the project to hold true for the rest of the project’s duration as

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678 The overall course content was as follows: Social mobilization and community development; Introduction to the on Rural Village Water Resources Management Project; Positive discrimination policy, Affirmative action and pro-poor policies; Social inclusion; Rights Based Approach; Conflict management, Mediation or arbitration skills and socio-psychological counseling; Participatory monitoring system (Pictorial chart Presentation technique); Practical exercise on saving, credit and record keeping system; Enterprise development (sector and market chain analysis); Preparation of business plan and rural enterprise development; VDC planning process and concept of Capital Grant Fund; Communication skills; Institutionalization process; Gender and development; Leadership development and leadership rotation; Health and sanitation; HIV-Aids, Preparation process of Water User Master Plan (WUMP); Operation and maintenance.

679 Interview PSU [54] 2014.
well. One participant explained, however, that despite the lack of formal trainings in conflict resolution or management, there had been a great deal of learning through practice:

PSU employee: Yeah, well, there were more trainings on water conflict, but because we experienced some pretty ‘hot’ times at one point and we had a lot of internal meetings on how to act in those situations, all of us did of course learn a kind of practical conflict management, and how to approach those situations in a … cool manner, without getting involved in the racket ourselves. So I believe that many of us learned it just through doing and the [dispute] situations. And through us having such a good team and an open atmosphere…[for] discussing any issue within the PSU: what the problem is, and who is what and where…This has been a principle for our staff all along, because then we don’t get any of that …gossiping, inaccurate facts or distorted news, or any of that kind of – backstabbing. You know, that – well – who is talking to whom and where and what they promised and bla-bla-bla. But if you think of real – like formal training, I can’t think of any…

As the project came toward the end of its first full year of implementation, the commitment to Do No Harm principles and Basic Operational Guidelines – established already since the design phase project documentation – was restated in the Annual report, ensuring that the project would continue to work "in the interest of the peace process." As was the case in earlier statements of the kind, no closer explanation was provided here either as to how this had been, or would be done. When I inquired about this from project staff, the reasons for the meager capacity building with regard to conflict management and resolution as well as little or no focus on the Do No Harm principle and the BOGs were explained to me as follows:

PSU employee: There was the idea [in the beginning], that we’d go, or get some kind of basic training little by little for our staff on this kind of thing. One of the [intended] courses was this Do No Harm, and what all are there… that we would have acquired precisely this type of systematic information. But then it was kind of, well, …overshadowed by all of the operational work. It was as if everyone was so busy, that then in the end nothing came of that kind of ... well, of [such] trainings...

681 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
682 Annual Report, Financial Year 1, UM 93.20 NEP, Nepal: Maaseudun vesi- ja sanitaatiohanke 2
PSU employee: I think that its maybe because the planning for the first phase was conducted during the conflict, and it [the project] was indeed postponed, so at that stage it had probably been more on the surface than later during the actual implementation phase. Since we got to implement the project in a peaceful situation… So…I’m not able to say anything categorically one way or the other, but at least during my time it wasn’t an issue, which would have had a terribly high profile [on the project agenda].

... of course there were these Basic Operating Guidelines – they were known in a way and they were [glued] somewhere to the sides of [project] vehicles and so on, but I don’t know, I don’t believe … that there was any extensive training on them [either]. We had trainings for the whole staff on decentralization and issues concerning local administration… but there wasn’t such a strong presence of these, …conflict sensitivity and such…”

Me: And why? Why was it like this?

PSU employee: Well I don’t quite know myself – I think that since it [the conflict] wasn’t considered such an important issue anymore…since the conflict was over in a way… - I don’t know, at least I don’t recall myself that there would have been clear discussions [on this]...

Similar sentiments were shared with me during my visit to the project in Achham district in 2008, a year and a half into the project. A governmental official at the district headquarters in Mangalsen – who had mentioned that the “past conflict continued to cast a shadow on the area” and named the lack of political stability as one of the main challenges of, as well as a risk to the project – told me that although some points of the Basic Operational Guidelines were still valid for the current situation, no major discussion was needed on them any longer. I had asked about the Basic Operational Guidelines also from a group of the project’s staff in Achham, who pointed out to me that the priority regarding conflict issues was “really very low.” I was told: “yes, the BOGs are still valid…but we need not face such problems nowadays.”

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684 The same research participant wrote in an e-mail after the interview: “At least the BOGs were in the windows of project cars and there was a short introduction on them [for the staff] at some point.” E-mail correspondence PSU 2014.

685 Interview PSU [52] 2014.


Finally, the identification of known and potential source disputes was reported as not having always been systematic in the first project year, and efforts to discuss solutions on the local level had not been witnessed frequently. As a reaction to this observation, the annual report concluded that the terms of reference and the instructions to consultants working with the project should put more emphasis on the "crucial importance of solving source disputes (or identifying [them] if solutions seem difficult)." The recommendation in this regard was that source disputes were to be highlighted and discussed in coming project workshops on the Village Development Committee level. 688 This was confirmed as having been done also in Achham:

From PSU level, from project level, conflict, source conflict orientation was done… at the end of the first phase. How to solve the problem of source conflict. Such kind of orientation was given to the users’ committees…chairpersons and other also. This was done in Mangalsen….they were oriented in such a way that they should resolve their conflicts about water resource[s] at their own VDC level.

…[The] Village level water and sanitation coordination committee… from time to time, they are [trained] about different kind of orientations for sustainability. They should not be any conflict about the sustainability… I think all these things are also related to the conflict also…that they should not conflict (.?) their schemes, they should regularly follow the laws that are made by themselves. These are the things that are oriented from time to time.

…but] especially we are not running any such kind of orientation, which is related to conflict. I don’t think so.689

6.3 Challenges of local and political pressures – “[it’s] a bloody [fierce] negotiation…about who gets chosen”

During the inception phase, the project administration at the support unit realized that there was a complete lack of any existing guidance or clear provisions from the Nepalese government’s side on hiring NGOs in support of project implementation.690 They took

688 Annual Report, Financial Year 1, 28.9.2007, 8.
689 Interview Mangalsen office [53] 2014.
690 In addition to a lack of guidance on how to select and hire support organizations, I was told MLD officials in two separate interviews that there was also an almost complete lack of harmonization of development cooperation modalities within the water and sanitation sector at the
note of the inconsistency of selection and hiring criteria by other agencies working in the field of development. The project therefore decided to “collect required information and coordinate with other organizations for harmonization of selection criteria among them in future.” It was further decided that “consideration for inclusive staff and … NGO board membership by women a[n]d the deprived groups must be noted and heeded” in the selection criteria. Finally, a point was made in the project documentation about the need to avoid “an elite capture and the use of politically active NGOs” in the selection of support organizations.

At the end of the first year the project’s policy of favoring female candidates and disadvantaged people in the selection of project support personnel was reported to have been generally well adhered to. “[H]igh political party pressures” regarding the selection of community mobilizers was mentioned, however, as one of the challenges to implementation in the first year. In addition to “local and political pressures” the phenomenon of *afno manche* (preferring of own people) had also been observed in some of the selected project VDCs. These trials regarding support staff and NGO selections were frequently brought up also in conversations I had with some of the project support unit’s staff:

PSU employee: … you know, most of the NGOs, they are affiliated with the local political part[i]es… I can share [with] you, when the project started to select the NGO[s], so that was really a hot potato for the project. How to select the NGOs… It was sooo (stretching the word) difficult, you know, in the district[s]. Most of the – all parties want .. [their] own NGO. So this was really, really difficult…

Me: How frequent was this in the project overall? Did you get a lot of complaints?

PSU employee: Well there was a fair number of them in the beginning, at least half a dozen… I would almost say that there were some sort of complaints in every other district. But they were of varying degree. In some [districts] they placed their complaints through a judicial route – through the Chief District Officer,… – who is in a way some kind of lower legal system.

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692 Annual Report, Financial Year 1, 28.9.2007, 12.
And then part of them were more like, writing in newspapers about being neglected in the process. Things like that. 693

Another PSU staff member spoke with similar sentiments about the challenges related to recruitments in the project:

PSU employee: … what we face here is that this political side creates a big ‘glob.’ Especially…when the project selects cooperation partners, NGOs and others, it really is a bloody [fierce] negotiation in the districts about who gets chosen. Often – almost 100% of the time it’s politically colored, the NGOs that are on the district level. So politics becomes part of the race with quite a force.

Consultant: There are often politicians in those NGOs, either as owners or members?

PSU employee: Yes, they are members. Also, we’ve bumped into – it was in Bajura or somewhere – some nasty [situations]… When these community mobilizers were being selected, it culminated into a pretty bad political confrontation.

Me: What does that mean?

PSU employee: Well, the choices need to – there were all kinds of mistakes in formalities and what not…it clearly escalated between the parties, like [between] Congress and the left wing, – as far as I understand, at the end of the day – the competition about whose people got chosen. And after all, it’s only two persons who get some 5000 rupees salary per month. And then…

Me: (interrupting) this is on the user committee level…?

PSU employee: On the VDC level… [where] two CMs, community mobilizers are chosen, who are then trained, and who are the hands and ‘antennas’ of the project in the VDC.

…

PSU employee: But [so] in some [districts] it has caused confrontation – partly the reason has maybe been that it [the selection process] has been carried out too quickly, that everyone hadn’t even properly received information of it. When it ought to be completely open, so that anyone who is even marginally interested, could apply…

693 Interview PSU [49] 2013.
Consultant: There really should be no politics involved in this kind of village – community mobilizer selection! It definitely blurs otherwise good work…

Another PSU staff member explained the *reason for the pressure and troubles related to recruitments through the country’s history and culture of nepotism and cronyism*:

PSU employee: … at a certain point [in the project] we had all these recruitment problems, because [the people] were used to getting… certain positions through political pressure. And [so] these kinds of people had drifted in [toward the project] from various directions… the type of persons who haven’t really had to do anything, because they trust that because their uncle is a minister or something… that they don’t actually have to do anything.

… the first phase of the project started out in extremely difficult circumstances [in this sense]… there was clearly a kind of league of people creating pressure through NGOs and political parties. And they did actually in the second phase too – some political leaders tried to push some half-illiterate guy with no arithmetic skills as a *technician* into the project, and he couldn’t even do an area calculation! – Just because he happened to be from some *party*. And we were just like: “listen, this is an engineering post, …this simply will not do.”

Despite the challenges of recruitment processes and NGO selections, one of my research participants explained that it was still, even with the wisdom of hindsight, a better way to proceed instead of hiring individual persons as consultants. This was explained through the perspective of supporting local capacities:

Me: So are you saying that…employing the [local] NGOs – will actually support the local capacities that will [be] more likely [to] stay in the area? As opposed to if you employ individual people…the capacity to act doesn’t stay?

PSU employee: Individual person…when the project is over, then this person will also be disabled from the district, or go somewhere.

Me: They go to the next place [to work]?

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695 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
PSU employee: Yes. It is not...like institutional capacity, you know? ...Okay, we can get ... good result[s] from the individual persons, but in the long term – it is not a good idea. [But] still my opinion, you know, NGO – especially the Far Western region, the NGO business is very, very difficult business.

... in some cases they [the NGOs] are more interested to [be] involved in the procurement [of supplies needed for project construction], you know?

Me: Oh?

PSU employee: When user’s committee[s] are very innocent, you know, they don’t know – I mean, more influence [can be asserted] by the NGO person. Because they [act] as guides to the committee – “you should go to that shop, or to that shop” You know, they are interested to [be] involved in the procurement. So this is also – I think – it takes time (chuckles amiably).

6.3.1 Project’s strong local presence acts as smoothing factor, and more

The presence of project actors on the local level, demanded by the project guideline, was considered by research participants as a valuable factor in ensuring clear understanding between the beneficiaries in villages and the project as well as in counter-balancing the challenges of local pressures and tensions related to recruitments, payments etc. This was explained to me on more than one occasion:

PSU employee: Well, we were of course interested [at the PSU] in what happens in the districts; and of course it is in some sense always a reflection of [what goes on politically at the level of] the central government in Kathmandu – ... the impacts do show in the districts. But we had so many districts [in this project], and every one [of them] has its own dynamics, its own flow and own history, different kinds of people through which some [political] parties emerge in various situations...again, I feel that there was a particular value in having [our own project] presence in the districts and the district headquarters, that we have the water resource adviser sitting there, who knows who’s who and what the effect [is] and what they are up to... But

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696 Presence of project actors on the local level refers here to the project structure in which the beneficiaries were supported in the planning and implementation of all development activities by a number of people working in the framework of the project locally, on site. These actors included local NGOs that were employed by the project to support implementation as well as technicians and water resource advisors at the district level project offices.
also being present in the VDCs [is important], because that is a whole different set of political issues there.

…

…the strength then in this kind of bilateral project is that we have people out there, and that we are in the field. It’s a value to all of us that we move [travel around] in the field and ask about these and we also encourage the user committees to ask. And in one district for example, the user committee, ha-ha (chuckles in amusement), had then been asking other projects too, some local NGO projects: “so what is your real budget and how much of it should come here and could we see the expenses?” and these kinds of things that we always ask them to inquire about [in reference to our project]. So this NGO had then approached our guys [project staff] at the district headquarters, saying: “what are you doing with these users? This has become impossible with them out there!” Ha-ha-ha (laughs out again)

Me: Ha-ha-ha (join in the laughing)

PSU employee: (still laughing) – I see this as a complete victory!

Me: Well of course!

PSU employee: And then one NGO expressed [to our project people] that we’ve – “before we were either asked to do something or to make a report, [but] you’re some weird project, as we have to do both for you!”

In addition to facilitating a better understanding between the project and the locals and functioning as a smoothing factor in the face of political pressures, much of the success of the project was attributed to this strong presence:

Mangalsen office employee: … there was a clear-cut understanding between the people and the project. I think [this] was [a] key thing [for success]. I think we should be very near to the people… mainly our staffs were in the VDC. They were VDC-based and they were in the VDC… in other projects they just stay in headquarters, only from time to time they go to the VDC. But in our project they are field-based. They stay in the project and they are very near to the project, I think so.

Me: So you are talking about the support organization staff, that there was the demand that they actually spend a lot of time in the villages and – they

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697 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
raise the awareness of the people and have them...really understand what is being done and why and what -?

Mangalsen office employee: (interrupts) Yes. Yes! Such kind of arrangement is in our guideline that the staff of the SO should be village-based...

One of my research participants from the Nepali administration offered yet another perspective on strong project presence locally. He explained that it was key also to ensuring technical quality and sustainability of the project:

MLD official: ...[The] proficiency and presence of technical people for long duration – at least for the construction period is one of the keys [to success in the project]. And helps in sustainability. The awareness [proficiency] and the presence of technical expert people. Say the technician whose expertise is ... [related to] construction work... That is very helpful. Because one day of field absence may – I mean committee may not get idea of how to put things in right way. If he’s absent for two to three days. So the presence of the technician is [crucial]. I mean he should be there – because once you are going to work with community level people, so mostly people have no previous experience.

6.3.2  Achhamese experiences of NGO and social mobilizer recruitments

In contrast to the narrative above of “fierce battles” between NGOs to be chosen as support organizations for the project on the district level, the Achhamese NGO, Participatory Rural Sustainable Development Center (PRSDC) was hired to work in support of the project in Bhatakatiya VDC without drama. It could be that this perspective of

698 Interview [53] 2014. SO is the abbreviation used in the project for support organization.
699 Interview MLD [46] 2008. This interviewee went on to explain how the know-how of digging the trenches for water pipe deep enough (90cm), taking into consideration sharp boulders that could damage piping, and the correct way of mixing and using cement were the small, but important things that locals in the remote project locations often did not have any understanding of. At the same time it was these factors that could have significant effect on the constructed system’s sustainability.
700 Research journal 26.3.2008. According to the project’s staff in Achham, the selection of PRSDC as the project’s support organization for work in Bhatakatiya was fairly straightforward. The hiring had been carried out through a pre-qualification and technical evaluation process. The notice for the position of support organization was published in a regional paper, the Far West Daily. A total of 23 NGOs sent in their applications, of which 14 passed the pre-qualification screen. 11 of these NGOs had submitted their technical proposals for conducting the work planned for the support organization, seven of which were then invited for interviews. Only five of these selected NGOs, however, showed up for the interviews with complete teams. Two of the interviewed NGOs had
“no drama” in the selection process is in part obscured by the fact that I did not have the opportunity to discuss it with any of the competing applicant NGOs, and thus never got to hear their story. I was, however, given an explanation to the smooth selection process by one of PRSDC’s staff members. This person had been involved in the project from the very beginning and had also stayed on working with the project in the second phase. He confirmed to me during Skype chat we had about the project that partner selections are indeed a “great challenging issue” in Nepal, including Achham. He explained to me that the recruitment process for the role of support organization for the project’s second phase starting in 2010 had in fact been much more tense than it had been in 2007: “some political interest[s] impact[ed] to [the] selection process.” Generally, he maintained, NGOs are lead by politicians who have “vested interests” in processes related to various aspects of development projects, such as the case of recruitments and selection of partnering/support organizations. His explanation for the smooth and easy support organization selection process was that right after the conflict when the project was started, there was a general lack of knowledge and understanding of development projects by all stakeholders.701

The recruitment of the two community mobilizers702 had also gone fairly smoothly in Bhatakatiya. There were, however, some ripples on this end of the story. Two social mobilizer vacancies had been announced for Bhatakatiya after the selections had been made on the district level about which areas would become so-called first batch VDCs703 of the project. The aim set as guidance for the entire project in all districts was that there should preferably be one female and one male social mobilizer in each of the selected project VDCs. The selection criteria for male candidates was that they had to have passed high school (completion of School Leaving Certificate, commonly referred to as SLC-passed), and for female candidates that they should have passed

had a person each missing from their teams. They had been given an additional 15 days to come up for the interview with complete teams. Neither of them took the opportunity. Thus the project ended up with five NGOs that met all of the pre-qualification and technical evaluation criteria established by governmental rules and specifications outlined in the project’s implementation guideline document. PRSDC was one of these finalists and was eventually chosen to be the support organization for Bhatakatiya without any complaints from the other applicant NGOs.

702 The terms social mobilizer and community mobilizer are used interchangeably in the project documentation. I tend to prefer the term social mobilizer, following what the people I discussed my research with locally used more often.
703 The so-called “first batch VDCs” of the project in Achham district were Bhatakatiya and Dungachalna.
the eighth class of high school. Dalits were to be preferred in the selection of both female and male social mobilizers. In the case of Bhatakatiya there had been 14 male and 6 female applicants. The selection of the female social mobilizer was made based on an exam arranged for the applicants, only one of whom passed and was subsequently appointed for the position. In the group of male applicants there had been only one Dalit, who also met the requirement of being SLC-passed. The project staff on the district level had thus decided to give preference to this applicant and appointed him for the position directly without an exam. As the other 13 competing applicants also met the selection criteria related to education, the choice of a Dalit man led to tensions within the community. The upper caste members did not seem to accept nor understand the reason for this preferential treatment of Dalits:

Many conflicts arose in the village: some said that “no, he should not get the job – this group…should get [it]!” … The upper caste [community members felt they] should get the job because [they] are educated … “Why should the Dalits be recruited?” they asked.\textsuperscript{704}

The tension and rumors going on in the community about the recruitment had made the selected male social mobilizer feel anxious. On the other hand he had been grateful for having been selected, and felt that without the project’s criteria of prioritizing Dalits, it would have been “impossible” for him to get the job. He also saw his employment as an opportunity to improve the situation of the coming generations:

Now the people criticize the Dalits – but this is because our parents didn’t have any education…that’s why we are in this condition. But education [alone] cannot improve our condition…without this opportunity the condition of the Dalits cannot improve. Dalits never got opportunities before, thus we are behind in development.\textsuperscript{705}

The project staff took on a facilitative and calming role vis-à-vis the competing applicants’ complaints about the selection:

Don’t make noise [they said]… he is only one person… [and] the main target of the whole development program is meant for the Dalit group. We have one competitor from the Dalit group so we’ll give preference to him –

\textsuperscript{704} Interview Bhatakatiya [10] 2008.
\textsuperscript{705} Interview Bhatakatiya [10] 2008.
while if we chose among you… it would be very difficult to choose also. So let it be. If we give the opportunity to him, he can also do something better for the community…  

In the end all the other applicants had congratulated the selected male social mobilizer and said: “Don’t mind – although there was this conflict [about the selection], we’ll help you during the project.” This made the selected male social mobilizer feel good.  

The recruitments and employment opportunities to the project emerged in my discussions with the locals of Bhatakatiya on only one other occasion. This happened almost by chance during a conversation I had with a senior (59 year old Brahmin) community member about life in the village in his youth, and how things had changed after the conflict. We had been sitting and talking with this man in the sun for quite a while when I noticed that Bimala, my interpreter was getting tired. My negotiation with Bimala about her energy level to continue translating was unexpectedly followed by a transition in discussion topic toward employment opportunities within the project:  

Me: Can I still ask you about something? It’s nice to hear that the community is unanimous [about development]. Can you explain why this is so?  

Bimala: What does unanimous mean?  

Me: That they agree, that they unite on these issues of development for example.  

(silence)  

Bimala: Can you ask the question again?  

R: Didi, do you need a break? You seem really tired.  

Bimala: No.  

Me: No?  

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708 Bimala is the name of my interpreter and research assistant. She has given her consent to be identified by her real name in this dissertation.  
709 Didi means big sister in Nepali. People commonly call each other by these generic names instead of by their first names.
Bimala: I’m a bit hot too, that’s why-

Me: Just tell me if you need a break, okay?

Local man: Can you get a job in the project? [Even] as an old man [like me]?

Surprised by the abrupt change of topic and this question, I told the man that I didn’t know, but that maybe he could talk to the people in the project. To this he responded in a somewhat unsettled manner that he had in fact already spoken to them, but that nobody from the project had responded to his request for employment in the project for himself and his son. Later on he said, however, that he realized he was actually too old for employment himself: “Our time has already passed for jobs..” But still, he was unhappy that his son had missed the opportunity to apply as he had been away working in India at the time of the recruitments.710

6.3.3 Project calls for transparency but takes hands off approach to recruitment drama: “It’s not our business, it’s the business of the local administration!”

During my conversations with various project stakeholders about the challenges related to recruitments and NGO selections in the various project districts, I became interested in the project’s response to these situations where they witnessed political party pressure and preference of own people, or afno manche as it was called in Nepali:

Me: Well in these – how do you react to this as the project then? You said in passing that maybe the selections had been done too hastily?

PSU employee: Well (stretching the word slowly, as if in contemplation), these district level selections… if we look at it from our Dhangadhi [project support unit] perspective, we don’t do very much of anything really. We just discuss it with [i.e. inform] the Embassy and stay put… because the right to these selections has been assigned to the local administration in this project – to the management committee[s] within the district[s]. And therefore it is they who primarily are responsible, and we just keep our ears open as to their success in resolving [the situations].711. Or if we have a problem like this, complaints can be made about administrative issues and other points of dissatisfaction to the

711 Emphasis added.
Chief District Officer – who is the administrative chief here. And they do get a lot of complaints. I may be exaggerating a bit if I say “bloody fierce” [negotiations], but anyway… we’ve had quite a few of those complaints in particular concerning NGO selections, and then we’ve written [in project reports] that ‘there must have been malpractice’. But never has there been clear identification of [a certain] someone doing this or that; rather, it’s been more like hints and rumors. But everything has been solved on the district level; they haven’t gone any further than that [with complaints]… It’s also a question about money…

…it’s just – that they are aligned politically or otherwise… according to power bases and they try to use their relations and display their power in the selections.

Me: So … you try to stay low and just wait for them to make the selections in some way? What do you –

PSU employee: (interrupts) … it’s not our business; it’s the business of the local administration! And then when they [the appellants] get a reply [to the complaint] from the administrative chief … and if they are not satisfied with it, that’s when we have to start unraveling the case [from the project’s side].

This point about the challenges related to recruitments was elaborated on in an interview after the ending of the project:

PSU employee: Of course we had selection guidelines and things like that, but of course we didn’t then have any instructions on how to then ha-ha (laughs, as if in slight embarrassment) act when these complaints start coming in. But it was easy in the sense that we knew that it was a local process how complaints were to be handled, so we just directed the complaints to the local level administration. Also we agreed with the Embassy that they wouldn’t meddle in the cases either… Because in practice it’s the local decision-makers who make the choices. So they can sort it out. But if there are deadlock situations, then the Embassy or project can come in to help out.

… the whole point of the project has been that we support the local administration… and precisely the point that if there are disagreements, then

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it’s not the project that starts to mediate, but first and foremost the local administration has to take care of it.\(^\text{713}\)

In response to my question about complaints about recruitment processes, one research participant explained to me the project’s approach of self-reflection and transparency:

We do…. if we get a comment [or complaint] like this, we do ask for a statement from our own people [project staff in the concerned districts]. They write a page or two about how… the process has gone, and what has been done… so that we can then be somewhat calm ourselves.

Me: So that you’re not caught for a protocol error, you mean?

PSU employee: Yeah, or – [also] if our own people don’t believe that we’ve done the right thing, then we have to start undoing such decisions of course. I mean, you can’t just lay back and be passive in that way, like: “what if no one notices anything.” (Chuckles, joking)

… But then there’s the thing, that we have transparency in everything. We have a pretty thick bundle of information on [all] NGO selections; of how it all happens, how points are given and so on. So what happens to those who have complained – they are the ones who lost [the bid] or who haven’t read the instructions for some reason, [or who] haven’t had a good enough team, or something.

Me: …it sounds like transparency is really quite important?

PSU employee: It is – an important factor. It’s due to that [transparency]… I mean it wouldn’t be possible to calm things down otherwise. But as the system is such that we can refer to it, like: this [decision] is based on such and such [criterion]… \(^\text{714}\)

Whereas problem-solving within the project was portrayed by some of my research participants as having been dealt with a hands off approach, leaving responsibility largely to the local administration, transparency was emphasized by most as being crucial in the project’s way of dealing with the pressures related to recruitments:

PSU employee: …we got all kinds of things fixed [during the course of the project], which was in part due to having such a good team with common

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\(^{713}\) Interview PSU [49] 2013.

values, and that everything, everything that could – type: be glued to the walls to be seen or announced in the paper, *everything* was visible, *absolutely everything*. So – that way we got the recruitments to calm down too, as they understood that this is really an open and honest recruitment and the best thrive. Here are the exams and the tests and the CVs and everything. \(^7_15\)

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PSU employee: … The NGOs – or in other word the political parties really tried hard [to assert pressure]… But… the transparency in [all of] it, in the selections has really helped. The fact that everything is public and clear. The decisions made are legible [open to be seen by anyone].

Me: Yes, transparency is a theme that has emerged in other interviews too… that it’s considered important. – But how do you achieve it? What has been the key to success in transparency?

PSU employee: Well, it’s the publicity. For example, say an NGO selection – first of all the criteria is accepted together. All of the counterparts join in accepting the criteria. Then there’s the selection panel that must stick to the defined criteria. And then it’s publicized. First the short lists, those are made public, including the points scored. All of this – everything is public information. So if someone wants to complain they can complain. But it has really reduced the amount of complaints. In the first phase of the project we made the mistake that we didn’t pay *as* much attention to making absolutely everything public. And then we did have complaints of suspected cashing in…\(^7_16\)

In the same way as many other characteristics of the project, the tradition of transparency in all project work also had its history in the Lumbini project:

PSU employee: *Both* parties to the conflict appreciated the transparency on the village level [in the Lumbini project].

Me: Mm?

PSU employee: And in my opinion…this approach of transparency suited the Far West really well, because the conflict background was *even* stronger [there] and had lasted longer too than what it had in Lumbini… but this, the fact that villagers make their own decisions, and everything is transparent; and the significance of our project personnel is precisely in the point that we

\(^7_15\) Interview PSU [57] 2014.

\(^7_16\) Interview PSU [49] 2013.
are present. That we monitor and inquire, and we support the villagers also to ask questions themselves about where the money comes from, what it went to, what did the cement cost, did all of the sacks arrive that were intended, or did someone snatch some from in between there too? These kinds of things. So in particular the armed party [Maoists] who championed the cause of the poor people who had always been sidelined…they really liked this method and were always present in our public audits and these kinds of things… but then this same approach and tools – this, the reason for starting from Lumbini was, because it was the same [implementing] company [FCG] and quite a few of the same Nepalese staff, [were] used in [this project in] the Far West too.717

6.4 What about contextual realities and the peace process?

With the first year of the project coming to its close, note was made in the annual report of (the mostly positive) changes in the implementation context of the project at large. Nevertheless, the risks identified for the project in the coming year were assessed as remaining very similar in nature and intensity to what they had been at the beginning of the project.718 The project’s commitment to take into consideration the new political situation of Nepal as well as the context in which the project was being implemented was also reiterated – word-for-word – in the annual work plan for the second financial year719:

The Project … will support and respect inclusive, broad-based national priorities of the Interim Government and link the peace with the development process in order to prevent future conflicts. It will strive to ensure that it works in the interest of the peace process, respects Do No Harm principles and complies with values and norms expressed in the Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs). It will strive to ensure that poor and discriminated groups benefit from basic services and public investments in a

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717 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
719 This commitment was repeated several times throughout the project documentation in the same wording. After the occurrence mentioned here, it was restated two more times: in the annual report for the second financial year as well as in the annual work plan for the third financial year.
non-discriminatory way and to promote inclusion and actual power sharing in community...”

As before, the question of the more concrete plans for how these commitments would be fulfilled was not spelled out in the project documentation. Other than this repetition of commitments to consider the realities of the context, the conflict background, political instability, nor the fragility of the project context were in no way present in the annual planning of the second year. There was also no explanation as to how or by whom the risk assessment had been conducted.

6.4.1 Local water use planning: a way to work in a post-conflict situation

The Water Use Master Plan format (WUMP) was the primary concrete tool with which the project gained an understanding of its operational context on the local level. The WUMP was generally defined in the project’s documentation as a process-oriented approach used for planning and execution of project activities, described by one MLD official as “a very good and integrated approach” with which local people are “quite satisfied”721. The water use master plans for each project area were compiled as a joint effort of many actors. Participating in the work were representatives from the District Development Committees (DDC), the Village Development Committees (VDC), the Water Resources Management Sub-Committees (WRMSC), as well as the local communities. According to the WUMP report on Bhatakatiya722, equal emphasis was placed on both social and technical assessments during the field survey that formed the foundation of the resulting master plan. The plan was further described as covering four main components: 1) drinking water supply and sanitation, 2) irrigation and drainage, 3) environment and ecology, and 4) “other” (hydropower, improved cooking stoves, improved water mills etc.). The WUMPs were further described as guiding the procedures with which to identify all potential water resources at the local level. In addition to this they served the purpose of preparing the more precise action plans at the VDC and

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sub-committee levels. The resulting plans for water usage on the local level were comprised of the following elements:

- Information of the demographic and socio-economic features of the Village Development Committee and its sub-committees
- An inventory of existing water sources in the defined area
- A so-called hardship ranking with the aim of defining beneficiaries’ access to water sources and the level of services
- Listing of potential and prioritized projects in the area (drinking water, irrigation, micro-hydropower, ghatta mills\textsuperscript{23}, watershed management, environment and ecology)
- Identification of water sources for development by the beneficiary community
- Formulation of one and five year development plans for the area
- Definition of roles and responsibilities of all participating stakeholders
- Identification of capacity building needs for local institutions.

The water use master planning process was presented in the WUMP guideline\textsuperscript{24} as containing three phases and 17 steps as shown in the figure below:

\textsuperscript{23} Ghatta mills are traditional Himalayan water mills, used predominantly for grinding grain. See e.g. \url{http://alumni.media.mit.edu/~nathan/nepal/ghatta/ghattas.html} (accessed 26.2. 2015).

\textsuperscript{24} Guidelines for Water Use Master Plan (WUMP) Preparation (Dhangadhi, Nepal: Project Support Unit (RVWRMP) and Water Resources Management Program (WARM-P/Helvetas), 2007). The letter M in the far right column refers to monitoring throughout all steps of the WUMP process.
Figure 18. 17 steps of the water use master plan process

The point of *beneficiary participation at all stages* of the local water use planning was a key element of every description of the WUMPs that I ran into in my dataset, both in the project documentation as well as in the accounts of the tool by research participants. *In addition to serving as a mechanism for gaining an understanding about the operational context, the water use master plans were portrayed by the project staff as a tool with which to increase ownership, equality, justice and transparency in the project.*

PSU employee: *…without community involvement and participation it [development] will not work, not [be sustainable] in the long run… We should not impose from the outside. They [local communities] should clear by themselves what they need. That’s why we [require] in this project that the water use master plans are made – First of all, they should make their own plan. What ever they like: water supply, irrigation… they should [get] involve[d] and make their own plan. Maybe after ten years, 15 years Finnida will not continue – but this plan will stay! It’s not the project’s plan, it’s the*
people’s plan…So that’s why, from the very beginning, this participation and planning – is the most essential part. Otherwise you… just walk around the village, there is not water and you say: “okay, you need water...” [But] our perception may be different from their needs and perceptions. So that’s why [also] fairness should come from their side, not from our side – My thinking, my ideas might be different. But the people, they know best. They have lived there maybe 200 years… If I [or project staff] stay there just one night, how can I understand their problems, what they need? Ideas should come from the community, from the people.725

In a similar vain to the research participant quoted above who emphasized local participation and ownership in ensuring sustainability, another PSU employee726 explained how the WUMP process guided the beneficiaries of the project to think about their VDC as a whole, and to take responsibility for ensuring equitable distribution of development resources:

PSU employee: The idea or approach [of the step-wise WUMP process] was that how can we do, on the villagers’ terms, what the villagers need, want themselves, plan, consider important…

…if you take the VDC level as the point of departure, then the WUMP was the key tool.

…through the WUMP…we in a way force every one to look at all areas within a VDC – because it’s traditionally been here too that it’s always some other VDC that is in a better position. There’s maybe been better political representation, or they’ve been wealthier or – whatever the reasons, [but] some corner is always better off than the rest. And for example in terms of these water projects there are several villages here where new systems have been constructed in the same areas several times over.

Me: Okay – ? (Slowly stretching out the word)

PSU employee: And so now if one [proceeds] with just this kind of demand-driven approach, then those are the easy places, they are the places where people know how to ask and demand and be vocal, and they have a cutting edge politically, as they pretty much get through and get what they want in that way. But now the WUMP…it forces to look at the entire VDC, each Ward, each cluster. And to… take on to the map everybody that’s there. And it also raises discussion about who has what. Who already has [access

726 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
to] services? Are there services all the time? Well, aren’t there any? Who is still having to walk for four hours with some little water jug [to fetch their water]?  

The same research participant explained the WUMP process constituting a way for the project to be able to tackle the root causes of the conflict and thereby contribute to building peace, in addition to providing the keys to being able to work in a conflict-affected area:

PSU employee: ... So, it’s through this kind of approach that we also get to tackle the roots of the conflict. Because it [the conflict] started out from a kind of injustice, from the fact that some [people] have and others never do...I mean they were fighting for – I don’t want to sound like I would have been defending the whole conflict – but just before [Finnish] independence day here I was watching the Pohjantähti movie\textsuperscript{727}, and it just occurred to me that it was the exact same themes at the time in Finland that were [at the core of the conflict] here.

Me: Yes! I had the same sentiments when speaking to locals about the conflict in Bhatakatiya in 2008.

PSU employee: Yeah, so by means of the WUMP then – and this is now also [an] answer[ ] to how this kind of a bilateral development cooperation project can function in, I won’t say fragile situation, but rather really post-conflict, because when RV\textsuperscript{728} [the project] started in the first phase, it was right after the conflict. And a conflict like that doesn’t just end all of a sudden one day, but there are all kinds of things left brewing [beneath the surface], so it was ... one could almost call it a time of conflict really, in that sense. – But this kind of planning method, WUMP, which is ...carried out by the villagers themselves...it really [creates] the kind of ownership, that “this is our plan, we have set the priorities ourselves: this is the marching order, there’s nothing in that Ward, that’s where we start, and like this! (I sense a smile and feeling of pride in this).

\textsuperscript{727} The Pohjantähti (Northern Star) movie refers to a movie based on a novel trilogy written by Väinö Linna. The story combines one family’s story from the 1880s to 1950s – as seen from the perspective of an ordinary person – and woven into the changes of the Finnish society (language disputes, nationalism, socialism, World War I, Finnish independence, the Finnish civil war, the Lapua movement and World War II). The trilogy brought into public discussion at the time of publishing, at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, the events of the 1918 civil war from the perspective of the losing party of the war known as the Reds. This has been considered a particular merit of Linna’s work. Väinö Linna, Täällä Pohjantähdän alla 1-3 (Helsinki: WSOY, 2003 [1959, 1960, 1962]).

\textsuperscript{728} Research participants often referred to the project as RV, as short for RVWRMP.
Me: Yes, yes.

PSU employee: [So] … this kind of a method it is a good opportunity to take a point of departure to the kind of development that also… enhances the peace process… Through it, it is possible to get to the causes of what triggered it [the conflict] in one time. To… the fact that some have and others don’t.

Me: Mm?

PSU employee: Then [locally] on the scheme level the Step-by-Step [approach of the WUMP] ensures participation and transparency and the development of the abilities [of the local beneficiaries] along the way as the construction work proceeds. Through that [process] the aim is increased ownership and also sustainability of the structures in the future too. A feeling that “this is our thing and a water system that services us, and not any “Finnida tank,” that Finnida will come then one day to repair. So it’s these two key tools: the WUMP and the Step-by-Step. And in particular the – well we actually spoke about the VDC approach [already] in the Lumbini times – the point that we don’t go to just any arbitrary place, but that all of the areas in one VDC are looked at, so that there aren’t any of those Wards or clusters left there that always get left behind from everything and to whom nobody listens and have in some detrimental places sunken into [the attitude] that “no one listens to us any way, so we won’t bother attending the meetings.” Like this. 729

In the absence of functional local administration, a so-called multi-party mechanism had been set up in the Far West in order to gain political consensus to back up decision-making. The mechanism had, however, turned out to be challenging to navigate and to negotiate within. The water use master planning system was thus perceived by research participants at the PSU and on the district level as a good tool with which to fend off political pressures toward the project:

PSU employee: Say you are dealing with one of these NGO havocs [referring to NGOs asserting pressure on the project], to which we tried to find a peaceful solution, and one that everyone could agree on what the problem is and how do we solve it. And then you have a room full of people – and you don’t actually even know whom they represent. It could be that there’s a ‘party’ there that represents just themselves and their cluster (laughs, as if relaying the tragi-comical nature of the point) – three houses and their own family. And then of course from the parties in power you can

729 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
make guesses… about how much they have behind them in a VDC. But in any case you are negotiating with this whole crew and trying to arrive at a consensus.

Me: Mm?

PSU employee: So it did make those negotiation situations somewhat weird, because – especially these little parties – they might be representing just their own family (chuckles again with similar sentiment of irony).

Me: Mm – m-m.

PSU employee: So, now that you have something like the WUMP, where it goes through a clear and matter-of-fact process where everyone maps out where there are houses and what they have and who already has water and who has this and that, then any party can’t come and meddle [with the decisions] in between… if they have agreed on the priorities together; that this is the order that we go in, that is where there’s the worst hardship, there has never been anything in that area and that is the first on the list - then that is also what happens!

…[this has worked well] and the WUMP has [prevented] political play and then the …infra-project goes to where it is most needed. And it was generally accepted, because the WUMPs are done first on the Ward level where the Ward is supposed to look amongst themselves: what the needs are here and who doesn’t have anything. And then on the VDC level. And this is why VDC secretaries and some people in the districts have appreciated [this system], as it has taken pressure off of being pushed to fund ad hoc projects [suggested by the strongest parties, as has traditionally been the case], ha-ha-ha (laughing out elatedly)⁷³⁰

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⁷³⁰ Interview PSU [57] 2014.
field survey based upon which the master plan was drawn: *due to the war there was a complete lack of functional community organizations (CO) in the area.*

...[V]arious community based organizations formed under the initiation of different international non governmental organization are collapsed as the nation plunged in to the decade long political conflict. After that, no such initiative has been taken for the formation of such organization...During the process of socio technical assessment not even [a] single community based organization was found to be functional.  

In other words, some community organizations had existed in Bhatakatiya before the war, but during the conflict period they had become non-functional. The relicts of former community organizations were revived with the support of the two selected social mobilizers. The groups were “given different types of trainings and activated” on behalf of the project. These COs subsequently took part in preparing the water use master plan and “other works” of the project.

The above perspectives of the state of community organizations in Bhatakatiya at the beginning of the project were brought up also in my discussions with the locals. One of the first things that was shared with me by community members when I asked them to tell me about the project, was that it had helped to get the community organized:

This project organized us. It organized a group and also a saving program…through which people can get fair treatment and other necessary things.

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The staff [of the project] encouraged us to organize a group [after the orientation meeting of the project].

Conflict background disregarded, focus on water resource disputes

The guidelines for preparing the water use master plans had provided detailed instructions on conducting social and technical assessments of the implementation

732 E-mail correspondence Project office, Mangalsen 12.10.2014.
735 Guidelines for Water Use Master Plan (WUMP) Preparation.
context. There was nothing, however, in the guidance document – nor in the related Water User Committee Manual\(^\text{736}\) – related to bringing about understanding of the conflict background or fragile political context of the implementation area.\(^\text{737}\) In terms of identifying possible sources of tension within Bhatakatiya, focus in the master plan was on disputes related to water resource use alone:

The field survey observed... few remarkable conflicts regarding the future development of existing water sources within the VDC. Communities of sub committee 3 seem... still reluctant to share the source for the drinking water supply proposed by the populace of sub committee 5 and is still the matter of debate between them.

Beside this the local communities of Bhatakatiya VDC do not have other social conflict for the present use and future development of water resources so far. In general, the local communities do not have any emerging issues related to water uses, water related stresses, conflicts, trade-offs and compensation. They rather take it as a transition from the customary rights to statutory right. However, during the implementation of WARM-P\(^\text{738}\) the User Committees to be formed for the project should be made aware of Water Act and laws enacted by the government for harmonization of conflicts and establishment of compliance monitoring system.\(^\text{739}\)

The field survey conducted for socio-technical assessment observed that community-based groups utilizing the present water resources for drinking water, irrigation and water mills (Ghatta) do not have outstanding conflicts except for the [case of the water resource] Pangreni Maj Mul\(^\text{740}\) among the local communities at all sub[-] committees...However, sharing of water for equitable distribution was key element particularly for interaction from the local communities at sub-committee level and at VDC level...The interaction session facilitated by the field survey team from IDRS [Integrated Development & Research Services] initiated discussions on the identified water resources schemes at sub-committee level planning. During this debate session, the participants discussed on awarding priority to identified water resource projects to arrive at consensus for prioritization. In addition,

\(^{736}\) Water User Committee Manual (Dhangadhi, Nepal: Project Support Unit, 2009).

\(^{737}\) The major activities prescribed for social assessment were collection of household level information and geo-socio economic information, wealth ranking, verification of seasonal calendar, water related need identification, social/resource mapping, and consolidating the lists of needs collected from different clusters and community organizations.

\(^{738}\) WARM-P is the abbreviation for Water Resource Management Project.


\(^{740}\) Pangreni Maj Mul is the name of a water source in Bhatakatiya.
opinion was collected from the Beneficiary participants to obtain their willingness to participate and contribute for the development of prioritized water resource schemes.”

6.4.2 “No conflicts come to mind from Bhatakatiya – peacefully it was running”

The implementation of the proposed schemes in Bhatakatiya was described in the WUMP document as having been planned in accordance to the felt need of the local communities. A priority ranking had been created for the proposed schemes through a process of consensus decision-making within the local communities. This was done in order to avoid conflicts during project implementation as well as to assure responsibilities for the sustainable operation and maintenance of the developed water resource schemes. The project documentation portrayed a picture of both the master planning process as well as the implementation of project activities as all having gone smoothly. No occurrences of conflict or disputes of any kind were mentioned in the official reports. This perspective was reinforced in my communications with one of the project’s employees from the Mangalsen office in Achham:

There were no conflicts and problems regarding the project in Bhatakatiya. People are very much happy having such project… During the project there were no such major problems. If there were some minor problems these were handled following the Project Implementation Guideline (PIG). All programs and schemes were implemented in a peaceful environment [and] all problems handled are seen in a positive way by community members.

Me: …can you tell me of an example of such a smaller disagreement in Achham, or specifically in Bhatakatiya that you would remember?

Mangalsen office employee: I exactly cannot remember the incidents, also the smaller incidents I cannot remember well…if there was minor conflict…then we followed our guideline and solved the problem. Let’s say there was the problem of the selection of a big scheme; then we formulated a team and [went] there and [went] to the site and finally we have arrived to the conclusion that – the scheme is in implementation now.

743 E-mail correspondence Project office, Mangalsen 25.8.2014.
... and in the social manner – let’s say, in the community – exactly I don’t remember any such conflicts which [were] arised by the people or community – I don’t remember... any conflict about that... If small conflict – that was known by our [support] NGO, they could solve themselves. It was not brought to...our level [to the Mangalsen office] [or] even to district level [the DDC administration]. If there was any conflict, it was solved in the village. Exactly I don’t know, [but] I think there was no such conflict. And it was, peacefully it was running... I think there was no conflict about the source[s] in the VDC...

A couple of days after the E-mail exchange quoted above, we continued our discussion in a Skype call with the same person. When I told him that I had heard of some problems in Bhatakatiya during my stay there in 2008, he replied:

There might be ... minor conflict among themselves. I think they solve themselves, I think ... [our] technical facilitator went to the project, and [found] that at that time distribution of work was not done so well... therefore maybe the conflict. I think later the technical facilitator ... went there and divided different cluster people to do the work. And the problem was solved by themselves.

Me: Mm – okay.

Mangalsen office employee: We had not to do anything. Only technical facilitator, help[ed] in a well manner, s/he solved the problem. Otherwise it could take a long time to complete the scheme. The Patpani scheme, you know?

Me: Yes.

Mangalsen office employee: The largest scheme, covering over Wards 1 to 7. And this scheme was completed very tactically. There were so many problems during the implementation work of that scheme.

Me: There were?

Mangalsen office employee: Yes. From time to time our staff went there, and the WRMC [Water Resource Management Committee]. The Committee and our staff solved such kind of problems. Suck kind of problems arise in every scheme. It is general [common] –

... simple things, in every scheme it arises – and the users committee themselves can solve. If they cannot, if UC cannot solve, then the ... WRMC solved the problem. If there is any such kind of problem, they can solve.
Me: Yeah. So the role of the project was more to facilitate the problem solving on the local level? That you tried to help the local level actors to agree amongst themselves?

Mangalsen office employee: Yes… Until now, all users committees are able to solve their problems if there is any. They can solve themselves. And they solved also.

Me: Yeah, yeah – sounds good.

Mangalsen office employee: Such … minor conflict[s] arise in every scheme.

Me: Yes, it’s a normal part of life?

Mangalsen office employee: Yes – ha-ha-ha (laughs, as if relieved) such kind of conflicts also – otherwise nothing will be done!744

Disagreements about poverty ranking

During my visit to Bhatakatiya in March 2008, I heard various stories about the project’s implementation. In a conversation745 I had one evening with my research assistant and interpreter Bimala and one of the support organization PRSDC’s employees, it came out that there had been a disagreement about the poverty ranking in the community:

SO employee: As we know, earlier the Maoist party had classified the society in three classes: 1) very poor; 2) poor; 3) middle poor.

Me: The “middle poor”? – That’s what [the young Maoist activist with whom we talked earlier] called those “who can afford something”?

Bimala: Yes, as [he] told, this was from the 14 members of the main user’s group. They used this system of classification in the main user group [to decide on priorities within the project]… Two days ago when they [SO employees] had gone to Ward number 1 – before this, they had already taken the household record…

Me: The household surveys had been done?

Bimala: (nodding) In Ward 1, there are 69 households. Among these the water users’ group classified that among it 65 are very poor, four poor and

744 Interview Mangalsen [53] 2014.
one is middle poor. On that basis they made a plan for the program. And now, today, one middle man visited him [the SO employee] and began to ask: “how I became middle man? – I don’t have any property! Who made this? Who classified me?”

Me: What is a middle man?

Bimala: Someone who can afford something.

Me: Oh, so the one person or household that had been classified as “middle poor”?

Bimala: Yes, middle poor!

Me: So … he said that “how did I become classified that way”? 

Bimala: Yes, who made the judgment? He was asking this from [the SO employee]… This man said that… “This means that my community is jealous of me, why have they put it in this way? – Today, I will not take any part in the committee’s work] – Though the community has taken part in the saving program, I will take that money from the program. I won’t be involved in this program!” Then [the SO employee] had convinced him that “don’t say that, this has not been passed from the DDC level – we’ll try to make [alter?] it. And you … know that if we get angry within the community it is not good for us. So we should also understand the situation of the community [as a whole]… and if you take the money from the saving program – this saving program is [meant to] benefit all of us…” So in this way he [the SO employee] convinced him. But let’s see what will happen tomorrow.

The SO employee then told us that this “middle poor man” had gotten angry. He explained to us that this was due to “the reality” that this person had never gotten a chance to take part in prior development projects from the Nepalese government’s side. That he had already a history of being excluded from development due to his wealth ranking. For example if any goods such as vegetable seeds or other resources had been brought to the community he had never had the opportunity to get a free share because the other people in the community had supposed that he was rich. Thus he got angry about the ranking in this project, and said that he would withdraw his money from the saving program. The SO employee then explained that as it was the support organization’s “duty to bring harmony in the community,” they had decided to change the ranking of this person into the category poor. This would be checked with other members of the water user committee, and then his classification would be changed.
I later found out in a discussion with a former PSU employee that this case of disagreement about poverty ranking shared with me in Bhatakatiya had not been exceptional. It had in fact been a fairly common challenge throughout the project:

PSU employee: ...whenever there’s any kind of subsidy available for development work, everyone signs up – ha-ha-ha – to be (laughing out) like ultra poor... It has changed quite a bit in the sanitation sector since then in the Far West too, as [offering] subsidies [to the most needy] have largely been nipped out [of the working modality]...

R: Yes?

PSU employee: So the kind of self-ranking intended didn’t quite work out the way one might have wished... I mean nobody hesitates to be ultra poor if free goods are being offered. (Chuckles, as if seeing humor in this)

Me: So was it – it was solved by taking out the subsidies then?

PSU: employee: Well, nobody should be giving out any kind of subsidies anymore [in the second phase of the project]... It’s more like a reward for when the job has been completed... so in that way the ultra poor still are supported... and if there is such a [subsidy] system, then it’s on the VDC level that the decisions are made about who it is that really need the material help.

Me: Oh? Okay. – Yeah, …this had indeed been a point of some tug and pull locally up there in Bhatakatiya...

PSU employee: Yeah, yeah. Yes, [and] the problem still exists...

"I had quite some palpitations – what if we are swindled by the first VDCs?!"

In addition to the perspectives described above on tensions regarding poverty ranking in Bhatakatiya, certain concerns regarding misuse of project funds in the otherwise smooth operation of the project were voiced also in a conversation I had with a consultant working with the project and one staff member at the project support unit level:

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746 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
Me: Well, how about – you’ve brought up some of these things already, but – have you experienced challenges in the project?

(silence)

For example related to corruption? – Or actually it wasn’t you who spoke about it, but someone else [I spoke to at the PSU] brought up corruption.

PSU employee: Ha-ha (laughing) – we haven’t gotten to that yet (smiling enigmatically)

Me: Yes? What kind of challenges have you faced so far in the project?

PSU employee: Yeah – well (stretching out the words) – I kinda reckon … it must have been exactly in Bhatakatiya [where you are heading to]. There’s this…preparatory phase in this project that lasts a couple of months, and then we start with the implementation phase when…in this case we started constructing the latrines, so when the implementation phase starts we give 50% of the budget to the user committee’s account. In this case we made a transaction of 100 000 rupees. And then the cashier and the chairman left for Nepalganj748 to buy the cement and all else that was needed [for the project] from the hardware store. So they were gone for about half a year.

Consultant: (Laughs loudly, seemingly knowing where the story is headed)

PSU employee: Yeah, I had quite some palpitations – what if we are swindled by the first VDCs?! And we are coming here to replicate the model, instead of – maybe we should have given them [just] a few thousand at a time? – as they’re not used to having to be responsible for the money. ‘Cause, that’s the background [here]. Many of our people talk about it, that here – for example the VDCs get government money, and the districts [too]. And they distribute it out to the villages and often the political parties divide it among themselves and nothing at all is necessarily done with it. Our people probably talk about this a lot [to you]? – Well, these guys apparently thought that this is a similar situation, that “let’s just withdraw the money and write up a report and that’s it.” But then they [in the district] had mobilized a whole machinery to work [on the case] and of course they set out the people of all the political parties too [to send out the message], in a positive sense, that “this won’t quite do this way” – ha-ha-ha (laughs) – The money is still lost, but the cement and pipes and other – you can go and see now if its all are there, when you go up [to Bhatakatiya]! (Laughs, chuckles at length with sense of irony) Its namely the exact same village, ha-ha (laughs) – but (with a

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748 According to the project’s guidelines all project-related construction materials should have been purchased from local markets.
serious expression) its probably better that you don’t start asking about it there directly.

But this is exactly the thing that easily strikes the project in the face, if we are open-minded [trusting]. These are possibly just too large sums for people who aren’t used to this. And then when they suppose that no one will come and ask what has been done –

Me: Yes…is it kind of like: the opportunity could make a thief?

PSU employee: Yes! Exactly. It’s a terrible temptation, you know, because after all the economies of the [local] people are run on such awfully small money there.

Me: So what happened when you put the machinery to work, and people were sent out, what happened concretely then?

PSU employee: I don’t know exactly… It could be that it was just an ex tempore thing, that they just thought that they would disappear with the money and see what happens. But … probably some people of the same group have for example sent out word … that this could become too big of a fuss.

Consultant: Yeah, like kind of a comrade-compliance [system]? …

PSU employee: There’s a huge risk here in that a big part of the men go to India for seasonal work. So if the timing is just right, then it’s a temptation to take some ‘travel money’ (chuckles, joking)

Consultant: Yeah, and then the opportunity makes the thief again.

“In the beginning we were laughed at – but we just had really strong faith in this”

With the risk of emerging as a laughing stock among other actors in the development sector, the project held on to its conviction of giving as much responsibility to the beneficiaries in their development as possible. Crucial in this approach were the public audits.

Me: …[M]aybe this was just a cautionary tale, but have you created some kind of systems of downward accountability for cases like this? Structures of responsibility and accountability toward the community?

PSU employee: Yes, we always have a system of public auditing and public hearings in these kinds of projects. If the job has been done well, then those who are literate can go and check from the [project’s] papers how much
money has been given and such. But most often the leaders of the user committees are the top dogs of the communities in any case. So people don’t necessarily have the courage to challenge them in that way, very easily.

Consultant: Yeah, it’s quite a volatile question, people are afraid – they are respected persons –

PSU employee: But they do have to account for [what has been done]… like: “this much money has been received and these things have been done and this much has been spent.” And as a matter of fact this is the official – I mean according to this new system of decentralization, this statute has recently become effective that no further auditing is actually done on these, [and] that the village people audit the use of money themselves. It’s a completely impossible task for government auditors to go and inspect these village projects, their accounting.

Me: Because they are so difficult to access?

PSU employee: Exactly!

…

Consultant: This is a kind of discipline that if someone withdraws the money from the account [and disappears], then construction is not possible and the village people naturally get angry with the one who took the money. This is how self-restraint is created [in the community]…

PSU employee: But it is true that in the beginning when we were just starting with the work [here] we were kind of laughed at: “you are totally banging your heads against the wall by distributing [large sums of] money like that!” (chuckles).

Me: Who was laughing?

PSU employee: Others working in this sector. [They said] “You are distributing money to the districts… they’ll put the money in their pockets, they are so corrupt!” So it was a bit sensitive to start with, but we just had really strong faith in that something will come out of this. We came up with this practice in Lumbini, because it’s so hard to go check accounts in the village frequently, and here in the West its many times as difficult to get to the villages – so… ⁷⁴⁹

Delay in project: landslides, farm work, broken toilet seats...

During my stay in Bhatakatiya I followed the advice given by the PSU employee who recommended that I refrain from asking about the case of the “lost money.” And indeed, not a single person mentioned it to me as such in any of the discussions I had about the project with locals. More than one person took initiative, however, to bring up the delays in the project implementation and subsequently postponed money installments. One day we walked over to Patakani with my interpreter Bimala to meet with a group of Dalit men\(^{750}\). They had been telling me about how they came to trust the project and how they would “worship the project as their parents” for bringing development to the community. At a certain moment the men started to talk amongst themselves. Bimala was not interpreting the conversation to me, but I kept hearing the men recite the abbreviation RVWRMP in their discussion so I asked Bimala to stay tuned to what they were saying. Finally after several minutes she explained:

Bimala: He was [saying] that the condition of this place with the project – during the rainy season; it [there] was a landslide. [And] all the person[s were]…going there. The point he made is that it became late for the toilet construction.

Me: People were what? I don’t understand now.

Bimala: It was, you know, during the rainy season – [there] was a landslide.

Me: There was a landslide? Where we are standing now?

Bimala: Yes.

One of the men then went on to explain to us how after the landslide he had himself constructed the platform we were standing on in front of the house, and how it had taken a lot of time. “That’s why he was late to make the toilet construction of the RVWRMP project,” Bimala translated, and continued:

So now he had not gained [received] the second installment of it [the project money] yet… so they are facing a problem, because they have not paid money to the porter…

The following day after lunch at the dada we were approached by the same group of men from Patakani with whom we had been discussing the project the day before. They said they wanted to relay a message through me to Finland to the donors “about toilet construction: we are facing some problems.” They explained how the project had come to their community a year ago and how the Dalit community had agreed to take part in it. The original plan had been for the project to provide 28 toilets, but the community had gathered and said they needed all of 40 toilets. The project had agreed to this. There were to be three installments to cover for the donor’s share of construction costs. A first 1,380 000 rupee installment had been made by the donor to the user committee’s account in July 2007, which was enough to cover the costs for constructing approximately 16 toilets. The men then told me that due to seasonal farming activities the work got off to a late start. By autumn they had, however, completed all 40 toilets. After the completion of the all of the construction work the community had requested for the second installment. They had communicated their request to the project’s office in Mangalsen. Much to the seeming disappointment of these men telling the story, they had just (on March 15th 2008) received a letter from the project’s Mangalsen office in which the community was “threatened” by the project staff: the covers of three toilets need to be installed and the project staff would come to Bhatakatiya in one week to check that the work is done. Only after that the final payment could be made. In their apparent frustration about the delay in receiving the second installment, the men went on to tell me that the community mobilizers had also not received their pay since three months, adding that “there is no coordination between the three project staff members in Mangalsen!” They claimed that when the project staff came to their community, they often had differing views. “They use different language in the community,” each representing their personal views as opposed to one clear project policy. The men further claimed that the Dalit community was not trusted.

Later that same evening one of the support organization staff members filled in the story from perspectives gained through visiting and talking to locals in the various project villages in the VDC. He explained that the community in Patakani was now worried about getting their final installment due to not having strictly followed the technical specifications set for construction by the project. When the

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751 The central market/square of the village was referred to as the dada.
752 Research journal 15.3.2008.
753 Interview [15] 2008. The following story is all from this same interview.
support organization technician had gone to conduct the final measurements of the completed work in Patakani, he had found that the toilets had not been constructed according to the agreement. The technician’s estimate was that the completed structure had cost 14000 rupees less than the sample latrine constructed by the project elsewhere in the VDC.

SO employee: …while measuring the toilets [it was found] they have not made them according to the agreement…this agreement was 5 feet height and 2.5 width, and the seats should be [installed in a certain way] and the pipes just like that. And they have not made it in this way. And they have a fear… that if the technician will come and measure the toilet and see the toilets, the seats and the tank… if there is any…

Me: If there’s anything wrong…they will not get their money?

SO employee: Yeah, and if they will not get the money they will get angry – [but] it is real that they have not made [the construction] according to the map or the estimates.

…

Me: So now they are afraid that they won’t get the final installment because they’ve not done the work properly from the beginning?

Bimala: Yes, secondly they said that – today when he [the SO employee] went to visit the [other project] areas, people asked him why the project was late in coming to them.

…

Me: according to the original plan, were you supposed to start earlier in those areas? And you’re delayed [now]?

SO employee: Yes.

Me: And they wonder why?

SO employee: They ask the question in such a way: “are the problems in Dalit Tole754 [Patakani] an obstacle to our development?”

Me: Ouch –

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754 Patakani village was formerly known as Dalit Tole, which stood for a place where Dalits reside. During the conflict the area’s name was changed to Patakani, which means “a common place for all people” in the local Achhamese language. Research journal 15.3.2008.
SO employee: The question was a direct question.

Me: What group or community was it [asking]?

SO employee: The people are members of the user’s committee on the VDC level, of the main committee – and they were mostly Maoist activists… of the Chhetri caste.

Me: So of higher caste than the Dalits of Patakani – and they asked directly if the Dalits’ misconduct is a threat to the project, if it’s their fault?

SO employee: Yes.

Me: And what did you say to them?

SO employee: [I] convinced them that first of all this program comes through the DDC level… it is a government office, so in the government offices things are usually late – and it is election time too. So I convinced people in this way [and gave them other examples of tardiness].

…

[I] told them: “please don’t feel that Dalit Tole is an obstacle for development, you know we have already surveyed the VDC level, so the staff of the Mangalsen [office] are also engaged in it. But before July, we’ll construct toilets [in] all households – there are 805 households. So, in this time, you bring your sand, collect the stones to make the toilets, and after that you can be sure that this program will come – and if you want to make the toilets soon, you should do these things [preparations for construction].”

…

Me: There was one thing that remained unclear to me. Today when the Dalit people came to us when we were at the market after lunch, they said that there are problems in this project. They said that we have only received one installment. I concluded from that…that they maybe should have gotten the second installment already as well. I understand that the final, third installment cannot be made until everything is okayed and completed and checked. But what about the second installment? The missing installment? Did they not meet the criteria? This is…unclear to me.

Bimala tells me that the SO employee is worried that I will get bored. But I tell him:

No, no, no! I want to learn the whole story, but it takes time 😊 (trying to sound as convincing and enthusiastic as possible)
SO employee: The story is BIG Anisa! (Laughs)

Me: Okay – we can continue later too, but I do want to hear the whole story!

The SO employee then explained the whole story to Bimala at length who then finally shared it with me:

It’s a big story about the second installment: When [the project] made the first installment, the money came in their hands. In the Dalit community. They took the money – you know where we…stayed…in the one house?

Me: The man whose house we saw and went inside? The guy with the green vest and the hat? – The sympathetic looking man?

Bimala: Yeah. His brother is the DDC member – a Maoist. And he had…married…a woman from Dhangadhi. This brother’s father-in-law has a hardware shop…that is the one side [of the story]. The other side is that according to the agreement of the toilet construction, …you should not buy materials from any other place. You [should] buy materials only in [a nearby] market…

Me: … in the project agreement it was stated that the materials should be bought locally…that’s the point, yeah?

Yes. But – they thought that this money… the [green vested man’s] brother took the money. He said “I’ll bring the materials cheaper from another place.” That’s why he took the money and used it. He didn’t bring the materials for 4 months…and when this news, this information went to the Maoist commander, he began to threaten this man. The Maoist commander found out that this group, these people were not doing their work on time.

Me: And then they were giving reasons [like] “we’ve had landslides and we have farming, and all of this”?

Bimala: That was [their explanation] for delay. They gave many reasons. When the Maoist leader of the DDC level…threatened…them: “why you are being late? This project is for us! On one side we’ll say that Dalits should get some development programs – and though we are getting the programs, then why are we doing late? You should do it on time!”

When he made this threat [confrontation], then the person who too, the money [the brother], he brought the toilet seats and other materials from Dhangadhi. When he brought it here, 11 [of the toilet seats] were broken. And when again he brought 11 replacements, three more were broken. That’s why they were so delayed and the money was missing for four months.
The SO employee then continued to tell us that although he had not yet been employed by the project at the time of these episodes of the lost money and broken toilet seats, he had heard that the project’s Mangalsen office staff had been in communication with the community about the delay. The Dalit community had given many excuses for the delay, but the project personnel and subsequently also SO employees had consistently informed the community of their responsibility for their project, that it lies completely in the community’s own hands:

We said that you should buy [the materials] from the local market. Although it costs [a bit more] - …and though it costs more, the project will bear that high cost. [So] then why you buy it from [Dhangadhi]…?

…On the one side they [the community] were threatened by [the Mangalsen office staff] and on the other from the Maoist leader…

...

So in the last minute they …brought the materials – but part of the materials were damaged. That’s why the project has been delayed and they are not getting the funds on time.

The toilet construction [in Patakani should have taken six months]…and yet the community didn’t buy the materials until [after] four months [had passed].

Me: And was this due to the fact that this brother of this man –

SO employee: (Interrupting) In reality, the brother took the money and used it himself! That’s the reality. But the other side reality …[seen] from the project[‘s] side [is that the community] had not bought the materials for the toilets [for 4 months]. And [so] how can they construct the toilets in two months? A question. That’s why the project staff of Achham, they said to [the community]: “make the toilets on time and then you take the final installment.”

Me: But why are they talking about the final installment because the second one…what is the criteria for the second installment?

...

SO employee: The …criteria for the installment[s] is that …20% will be released in the first installment to buy the materials, 40% will be during the construction, another 40% is after the completion of the construction. This was the first installment – only for 2 months. And…they [did not buy] the materials for 4 months…they have already taken the time.
Me: Okay, so in the agreement it is also said that you have to do it [complete the work] in a span of 2 months – and because they didn’t do it, that’s why they are not paying the second installment? Okay, this is what the Dalit people didn’t tell us today – they were just saying that we’ve already constructed the 40 toilets [and were insinuating that there was something fishy in the project staff’s working]

Bimala: You know, yesterday we have seen 2 open ditches [incomplete toilet construction] – He [the SO employee] says that they [men in Patakani] took us only to the house in which the toilet was constructed [ready].

Me: And yesterday when we were sitting in front [of one toilet], and I said that maybe we shouldn’t sit here if someone needs to use the toilet – and they said: “no, it’s okay [because] it’s not finished yet.” 755

Some days later, during a discussion about the project with another community member representing the VDC I was told in passing that the VDC had changed its strategy on payments:

VDC representative: In Wards 7 and 8 the project is going well [but] the VDC found that in Patakani the project had not been implemented according to agreement, and thus … the VDC released [only] the first installment, and only after completion of the [whole] project the VDC will release [all of] the rest of the funds [to the community].

Me: What was going wrong?

VDC representative: According to the agreement, the community of Patakani didn’t complete the construction in the set time…756

This VDC representative did not elaborate on the reasons for the delay nor share anything of the story of the “lost money” and broken toilet seats. A second support organization staff member explained her point of view on the “big story” of the delay of project work in Patakani:

When it became apparent that the community in Patakani was unable to conduct their work on time…they asked for an extension period for their work. This was difficult because the RVWRMP is not responsible for implementation. It is the DDC. [But] they got an extension on three separate occasions (3 x 2 months= 6 months). According to the agreement the

installments could have been made – but although the Dalit community claims that the problem is about the missing covers for the tanks, in fact the tanks themselves are missing too! In February 2008 when the SO field coordinator and the community mobilizers came to the community [in Patakani to monitor the progress], they reported to the DDC on the basis of the word given by the Dalit community alone – without actually counting all the toilets. When the reports were taken to the DDC, the district requested information of the exact measurements of all of the constructed toilets. The field coordinator then returned to the community and found that only 28 toilets had been completed. When he had asked why the community had constructed only 28 toilets but reported 40, the community had given all kinds of excuses about landslides; someone’s son leaving to India for work and so on. They had said: “please sir, give us an excuse,” and promised to complete the work in three days. And they did construct six new toilets in just two days. The field coordinator had motivated the community to perform, otherwise the project would not continue. But to this day, still five toilets are completely missing [although the men from Patakani had told us that only three covers were missing]. The Dalits [Patakani community] have claimed that they had to take a 50 000 rupee loan to construct the toilets because they hadn’t received the second installment. [The field coordinator] got angry and emotional about this. He said to them: “Why did you take the loan? You are denouncing the project! What will the project think and feel now – the project might pull out!” Later [the field coordinator] found out that the user committee had not taken the loan for the toilet project but actually for making of the school. There’s one person [in the story] with two hats: on the user committee and the chairman of the school. So it is true that the community had taken a loan, but it was for a different purpose. Now they just claim that they’ve taken it for the completion of the toilet project due to the late installation.757

6.4.3 Gender equality and social inclusion as lenses to understanding the context

The creation of a gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) strategy can be seen as one way in which the project redeemed it’s commitment of coming to an understanding of the operational context.

757 Research journal 15.3.2008.
If there is a clear understanding of the reasons for social inequity and the barriers that restrict access, then project designs can be more responsive to bringing about positive social change and lasting impact.\textsuperscript{758}

Toward this end, a study was carried out in the project’s working districts. The ultimate aim of the study and subsequent strategy was to be better able to tackle the barriers to inclusive development. The Gender Equality and Social Discrimination Study\textsuperscript{759} explored socio-cultural, religious, political and economic practices related to gender and social discrimination at the community level\textsuperscript{760}, and attempted to identify practices, values and norms used to justify and rationalize discriminatory practices. It also looked to opportunities for overcoming these barriers and to “increase voice, participation and assertiveness of … excluded groups.”\textsuperscript{761}

PSU employee: In the first phase… a so-called GESI study was conducted… up until then for example in Lumbini we had a gender strategy.

Me: Mm?

PSU employee: And in the water and sanitation [sector] there is a long history of all kinds of gender tools. But then here in Nepal – and probably also in many other countries where you have many different ethnic groups and castes and all kinds of hierarchies within them – they are one kind of… cause for conflict, ha-ha (chuckles, as if making a point that this is commonplace): that certain castes always get everything, you know? The positions and opportunities and government posts, or well – like this. So – the GESI study was conducted in the first phase.

The study identified a number of discriminatory practices based on gender and caste, and linked to socio-cultural and religious beliefs. The degree and exact forms

\textsuperscript{758} Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy (Dhangadhi, Nepal: RVWRMP Project Support Unit, 7.5.2008) 12.

\textsuperscript{759} Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Study (Dhangadhi, Nepal: Project Support Unit, 22.5.2008) The project’s various documents related to this study are commonly referred to by the abbreviation GESI.

\textsuperscript{760} VDCs of the project’s working districts were divided into three discrimination scenarios: worst, medium and best. In this way Sharmali of Baitadi (Worst), Dhungachalna of Achham (Medium) and Rugin of Bajura (Best), were selected for Part I and Sipti, Darchula, Rilu, Bajhang and Kushapani, Dailekh for Part II of the study, and the results were translated into a strategy on the basis of findings from these areas. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Study, 22.5.2008, 10.

\textsuperscript{761} Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy, 7.5.2008, 7.
of discrimination were found to vary across the studied communities, but justified similarly through a “triangular equilibrium of faith, fate and fear... built and maintained on superstition and traditional beliefs.”  

The study took note of recent political changes having focused on local democracy and having initiated discussion about inclusion – leading to some observable changes at the community level:

The research team observed non-discriminatory practices in public places. People now feel embarrassed to practice gender and caste based discrimination in public places.

Simultaneously, however, a number of challenges were identified in the way of the “much-needed social transformation central for sustained change”:

Change but not transformation: Maoist conflict was in many ways instrumental in bringing different kinds of changes to society, mostly in reducing gender and caste based discrimination. Examples include entering temple as a Dalit, girls with Chhau attending school regularly and many more. But the elimination of some of the practices such as restriction in entering temples and staying in Chhau Katero could not be retained. Many people are now following discriminatory practices because of the psychological fear of being a sinner and the cause of harm to assets and livestock. Respondents, both Dalit and non-Dalit of the study area clearly stated that Maoists cannot protect them from divine power so they could not retain the new practices which were forced. This clearly indicates that the change during the period of conflict was due to fear of guns and was not a distinct transformation in the society. It is due to lack of mechanism to transform and institutionalize the change that people have started practicing in reducing gender and caste based discrimination.

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762 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy, 7.5.2008, 7, 10.
764 In traditional belief and practice if the Mid and Far Western regions of Nepal, women who are menstruating or in delivery period are considered to be untouchable and are called chhau. During chhau periods, women are restricted from participating in the every day family life and they are made to stay in separate outdoor sheds.
765 Chhau katero refers here to shelters/outside dwellings, in which women are made to stay during menstruation. In my discussions with locals in Bhatakatiya the sheds/shelters were more commonly referred to as chhaupadis.
766 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Study, 22.5.2008, 52.
Creating a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan for the project was portrayed in the strategy document as a “useful first step in addressing… barriers and a strong indicator of [the project’s] commitment in this area.” Echoing the preceding study, the GESI strategy spoke of recent political developments in Nepal as having placed social inclusion at the center of a new national reform agenda:

While a relatively new development concept, popular discourse now acknowledges that barriers related to gender, caste and ethnicity consistently limit marginalised people’s access to economic and social development resources and benefits. In the … Three-Year Interim Plan (2007-2010), the Government of Nepal has continued to prioritise social inclusion as one of its cornerstones of poverty reduction and recognises that there is a need for further concerted efforts to ensure the representation and voice of the excluded in decision making processes.

Beyond bringing the perspective of gender equality and social inclusion to the “project level interventions… [the project recognized that it] cannot seek social change in project communities without also addressing these issues internally.” And indeed, there had been a conscious attempt to prioritize recruitment from marginalized and disadvantaged groups into various project support positions, such as guards, housekeepers, cooks, drivers etc.

In order to promote and support the socio-economic empowerment of women and disadvantaged groups, the GESI Strategy was designed to ensure that project interventions would be gender, ethnicity/caste, and pro-poor responsive; develop skilled and diversified staffing within the project; promote income generation and livelihood opportunities; and advocate for social change at all levels. The plan was for all these four areas to be addressed through a number of components and specific interventions that the project would then apply systematically in order to achieve its purpose and objectives. One of the recommendations in this regard was

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769 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy, 7.5.2008, 10.
770 Research journal 1.4.2008/Personal communication PSU. One of the PSU staff members told me in an informal discussion that they were really trying hard to stick to the principle of having Dalit and other lower caste people working for the project, even though their skills may not always have been quite up to standard. It was considered important that the project’s international and Nepali expert (and higher caste) staff could show that it is for instance alright to eat food prepared by a Dalit.
to provide conflict management training for project staff, support organizations and other relevant project stakeholders as a way to promote ways of addressing and minimizing conflict at the community and local levels.\textsuperscript{771} Despite this recommendation, as described earlier in this narrative, no such specific training on conflict management was conducted during the course of the project.

The GESI study and strategy discussed above had just been in the making around the time of my visit to the project and stay in Bhatakatiya in the spring of 2008. Although the strategy was not finalized until May, the effects of the project’s aim to bring about gender equality and social inclusion were tangible in Bhatakatiya already in March. What more, the project’s rules about including everyone into development work seemed to be part of a continuum of what the Maoists had been advocating during the conflict. These points were expressed clearly in my discussions with research participants:

Before the war women were not allowed to work with men. When the Maoists came to this community, we got the opportunity to join in the group.\textsuperscript{772}

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With the support of the Maoists we will fly the flag of development [there will be victory for development everywhere]…The…Maoists raised…women’s awareness to talk in the community. This brought change for the women.\textsuperscript{773}

The female members of the water users main committee in Bhatakatiya shared their sentiments on the empowering effect of the project:

There haven’t been any development projects here, so…this is the best so far. It is broad in scope. We are illiterate – we only know how to write our names through the Lutheran’s literacy program, [but] now we are members of a committee and we are excited about participating. We can now easily talk to people and express our views!

…[through this project] we learned that while the work in the community should be gender balanced, it should also include all groups. All people of

\textsuperscript{771} Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy 13.

\textsuperscript{772} Interview Bhatakatiya [23] 2008.

the community should take responsibility, so there will be success in the project.

... This organization has involved women, old people, all groups. It is the best policy. Before this project, women thought that men only can do everything. [But] when we were involved here, we found that we women can also do something. Even if we gave birth to 18 daughters...no value. Only boys counted. Husbands could even remarry in this situation. This project has brought change to this thinking. Earlier women widowers were not allowed to attend in any activities, decisions of development and so on. This too has changed on account of this program! While working there should be transparency, and energy within the women. And although the Lutherans withdrew their work [because of the conflict], this project came and supported us.

Me: Would the project look different if it were run by women only?

Female members of the water user’s main committee: Yes, if women could conduct the program by themselves, but men are important too! Men motivate men and women respectively [motivate] women. There should be gender equality in development!

Also another group of women from Parivan spoke about the effect of the project on increasing gender and social equality:

Local women in a Parivan: After the war... now there is relief when this organization [project] came here... we women were organized [through the project]... Also the project has organized a saving program with both men and women. Through it people can get fair treatment and other necessary things. Still now our government has not paid attention to us. We drank dirty water, [but] now we are drinking clean water. And also we got ...toilet facilities. We wish progress for the government of Finland!

Me: ...I have heard that the project has attempted to...include all different groups and genders [in its work]. Can you tell me about your experiences about this?

Local woman: Good! It has been good!

Me: What has been good about it?

Local woman: We got the opportunity for discussion along with the men. This was just like our home discussion. We got the opportunity to give

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[express] our demands also. The most important [thing] is that we got the opportunity to see your experience [as a female researcher coming to Nepal alone] too – because we have only seen foreigners, only from children’s books. But now we have seen you directly, and we can also talk with you!775

6.5 Half way through: project impacts seen to extend primary goals of infrastructural development

The Finnish Embassy’s Conflict Prevention Advisor Rauni Haapamäki portrayed the impacts of the project in June 2008 as having extended the primary goals related to physical infrastructural development:

Impact…is seen in villages where … capacity and awareness building as well as the scheme implementation have been going on for several months. It is clear that the awareness and confidence the villagers have gained from the participatory activities and the training is at least as important a result as the concrete and physical results of the project.776

Later in the year she elaborated these assessments in another monitoring memo:

[The] transparency of the activities is stressed by the villagers … and members of the community organizations and committees. There are regular public auditing meetings, ‘hoarding boards’; monthly bulletins and a community action plan so everybody can follow what is being done. They are proud[ ] of the high participation rates of the villagers and the ownership is evident… The people are extremely able to articulate their situations, make plans, find creative solutions to their problems and look forward to a brighter future. The community has take[n] the leadership on their own issues and attitude and eagerness for development is quite amazing.777

Apart from the point above about transparency, similar sentiments were shared with me in my discussions with locals in Bhatakatiya. As described in the chapters above, Dalit community members and women in particular felt that the project had empowered them to understand that women and other disadvantaged groups had just as much the right to take part in

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and make decisions about the community’s development. Several people told me how grateful they were to the government of Finland for bringing the project and thus development and hope to their community:

Local woman: We, the people of Bhatakatiya got the chance from Finland government. If there is development, we can go onward from darkness. We can go to the light from the darkness… We are poor, we wear old clothes, we don’t have new ones. But though we wear old clothes, now we wash them. We learned that illness is not a stamp [that the community is not doomed to illness].

In assessing the impacts of the project after the second year of implementation, the Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy, as well as the practices that followed from it, were reported as “contributing slowly towards more fair society.” No evidence or concrete examples of this were, however, provided in the annual report. This could be in part explained by the kinds of indicators used in the project, a point that came up in a discussion I had with representatives of the MLD:

Me: You said there are some indicators that have been developed in this project regarding the societal impact?

MLD official: Yes.

... 

Me: …what are they?

MLD official: …just like water supply coverage, sanitation coverage, [and]…how people are getting benefits of the program.

Me: What about … qualitative – the social impact? I’ve understood that the indicators of this program have to do with social inclusion, gender issues and things like that?

779 Annual Report, Financial Year 2, (Kathmandu and Helsinki: Government of Nepal, Ministry of Local Development and Government of the Republic of Finland, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2008) 21 The project’s documentation did not contain information of any pre-project baseline studies on the topic of equity or fairness of society.
MLD official: How many beneficiaries are from deprived groups, or [are] women, or Dalits. These kinds of indicators are [there] and exist also on the national level plan.\textsuperscript{780}

Me: So it’s mainly quantitative [indicators]? Numbers only?

MLD official: Yes. \textsuperscript{781}

On the other hand, political influence was again reported as having played a large role in the selection of candidates for the paid jobs within the framework of the project. Moreover, the observation was made in the report that it had been

\ldots hard for some women to attend trainings that are outside the village, and even after receiving technical training, it has not been easy for women to get jobs due to male resistance.\textsuperscript{782}

Regarding caste discrimination issues, the project recognized that addressing and changing discriminatory practices and attitudes \textit{“is a long-term process”} involving political, economic and social interventions. While acknowledging its inability to address all these areas, the project asserted its aim of raising awareness of caste issues and advocating for equal opportunity and participation of Dalits in all project activities. Steps toward this aim were described as having already been taken by mainstreaming gender and social inclusion issues into the various capacity building trainings offered to project stakeholders. Further, the annual report stated as the project’s intention to conduct further \textit{“GESI and GESI-related trainings such as ‘Do No Harm’ and Appreciative Inquiry\textsuperscript{783} … in the next fiscal year.”}\textsuperscript{784}

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\textsuperscript{780} The broader discussion here was about the compatibility of the indicators used within the project with those formulated by the Nepali national planning commission.


\textsuperscript{782} Annual Report, Financial Year 2, 24.11.2008, 33.

\textsuperscript{783} Appreciative inquiry is mentioned only this one time in the entire dataset. There was no definition or further explanation in the annual report as to what the content or aims of training on appreciative inquiry would be. I tried to find out about this through supplementary interviews/e-mail correspondence: why had appreciative inquiry emerged as an intended training theme into the annual report? I failed, however, to find an answer to this. Some of the persons I spoke to about it didn’t remember, while others did not respond to my inquiry. It is possible that someone in the staff participating in the writing of the report had seen the notion of appreciative inquiry mentioned in my research plan (which also included the terms Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity) that had been circulated at the PSU during my visit to the project in 2008.

The mid-term review and the Completion Report echoed the earlier assessment of the Finnish Embassy’s Conflict Prevention Advisor, who had seen project impacts extending those related to infrastructural development:

Some immediate impacts are already evident in the Mid and Far Western regions…there is a high willingness to contribute by the communities, women show more confidence and participation in the public meetings; and especially the public audits and hearings have empowered the communities to question and request financial and other information from the other projects in their villages, and overall to take more active role in the development of their communities. Communities have now started to demand other programmes and projects to be active in their villages and to have public audits and public hearings. Political interference and water sources disputes are now minimized due to… [the] participatory approach of the intervention.785

The mid-term review accounted for these impacts in part through the project’s “serious and responsible” approach to gender and social inclusion issues. The review found the project to have taken care of applying participation and procurement in a transparent manner, and public auditing of schemes as having been highly appreciated by beneficiaries and other stakeholders.786 Strong social mobilization as well as a contentment regarding the social inclusion policy on the side of the communities was observed by the review team:

...women and Dalits were found to speak freely and [community organizations and user committees/user groups] were mostly capable of making informed decision[s] on schemes and other community activities… The communities feel that the social inclusion policy is good. 787

Credit for more inclusion in society was not, however, given only to the project, but also in part to the past conflict situation and to the “New Nepal” scenario. The review team saw social inclusion as being easier for the younger generation, and maintained that the older community members did not endorse it enthusiastically.788

6.5.1 The project’s support to building peace

Further to the assessment of the project’s impacts at the end of the second year, and with reference to its fragile context, the project reported that it had contributed to post-conflict peace consolidation and consensus building in its working area. The fact that all political parties active in the project area were recognized as key stakeholders (particularly as local elected bodies were not in place) was offered as evidence. Moreover, “[g]ood governance, [as well as] democratic and transparent procedures” were mentioned as “part of the strategy in this regard.” Also the financial mechanisms used in the project – developed in the framework of the earlier bilateral Finnish-Nepali water project in Lumbini together with the Ministry of Local Development – were portrayed as strongly contributing to this end through transparent financial processes. 789

In addition to the usual ‘copy-paste’ section familiar from earlier project documents concerning the project’s pledge to take into account “the new political situation of Nepal and the context in which the project is being implemented” as well as the commitment to Do No Harm principles and compliance with the Basic Operational Guidelines (and, as before, without any explanation as to how these commitments were carried out); 790 the annual report for the second financial year included a separate section discussing the project’s support to the peacebuilding process in Nepal. 791 The project’s contribution was defined here through the Water Use Master Planning (WUMP) process, a participatory activity, which – as explained above – was portrayed as reducing and solving local water resource conflicts. The way in which the said conflict reduction and resolution happened in the framework of the WUMPs was not, however, specified nor accounted for in the report. On the other hand, with regard to the preparation of the master plans, it was reported that the selection of community mobilizers and formation of community organizations (user committees) had been delayed due to local disputes.

Further, the claim was made in the annual report that the project enhanced the coherence, organization and activeness of communities through community mobilization; capacity building;

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790 Annual Report, Financial Year 2, 24.11.2008, 1-2. This section of the annual report’s text is in future tense, which lead me to conclude that it has simply been carried over from prior documents without further thought as to its actual content. Here again, as in previous project documents including this same section, the annual report did not provide an explanation of how the new political situation and the context of the project had been taken into consideration.
institutionalization of community organizations; improving livelihoods; and by supporting communities in implementing their own schemes. The project was said to have contributed to peacebuilding also through its support to the “capacity of local government agencies to manage water resources, including conflict situations, and plan their development in a way that will not cause further conflicts and will support the National peace building process.” The more precise way in which the project’s support in these areas was thought to have lead to building peace was, however, left undefined. Moreover, what exactly was meant by “peace” in the report was not specified – also consistent with earlier uses of the term in the project documentation.

The project’s decision to support my data collection efforts for this research was described in the second annual report as a final point enhancing “better understanding and further actions [within the project] to support the peace building process”:

... the project supported a study by a Finnish post-graduate Anisa Doty on “Development as peace building?” The field study was carried out in March 2008 in Nepal and especially in Bhatakatiya VDC of Achham. The study will...give some recommendations to enhance the positive impact of the project activities and reduce possible negative impacts on peace building.  

Toward the end of my visit to the project in 2008 I gave a presentation of observations in Bhatakatiya at a coordination meeting of the project staff in Dhangadhi. Upon request of the project support unit management team I also facilitated a group discussion for the project staff and water resource advisers working in the districts on my research theme and conflict sensitivity. My understanding was that the team leader in particular thought of this as a way to increase the awareness of the project staff about conflict sensitivity, one of the crosscutting issues that the project had committed itself to in prior project documentation. When I later approached other project staff members in order to inquire whether or not anything had stayed with the project from the themes of my visit, I was told that “it is hard to say anything, as I have no information about who were present, what was discussed an what was agreed on during your visit.”

Also, as described earlier in this dissertation, another project support unit staff member had mentioned to me in an interview that the everyday activities and busy

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793 E-mail correspondence PSU 4.-10.6.2013.
schedule accounted for the themes of conflict sensitivity to not have been integrated in a more explicit way into the project cycle.794

Lastly, one of the PSU employees spoke of the project’s contribution to building peace through the chosen approach of multiple water-usage:

Although the conflict was officially over, those kinds of things [fear of soldiers and experience of violence] don’t just disappear all of a sudden from their minds. It’s in their personal experience and – of course people lost many family members [during the conflict] and all this. So you can’t forget those things.

Me: No. Yeah, yeah.

PSU employee: … Yeah, so in the RV [project] when we have this livelihoods thing – and of course water power, irrigation and all these. So it’s – and the cooperatives and all that’s related to them. So it’s also a question of people’s lack of opportunity to be trained or learn any kinds of constructive skills… So I feel that that has been part of our contribution to the peace process, that people learn new skills with which they can earn a peaceful living. Especially for those [young people], who lost a whole decade [during the conflict].

Me: Mm?

PSU employee: The thirty-somethings. Or the ones who were naturally on either conflict party’s side. Those, who know how to use a weapon, but not much else. So RV had a lot of these livelihoods things going on. And there were many in Bhatakatiya too – I think they were among the first ones who founded the kitchen gardens too – and then through hydropower, when you get electricity, that opens up more possibilities for livelihoods. So that has been the beauty in the RV project … this kind of multiple use of water for many different things. Because it can then open all kinds of other opportunities from there on. Like the cooperatives have shown, that many other things come through them… like businesses and children’s school funds and solar panels and buffalo shows and all these kinds of things, ha-ha (laughs, seemingly with a sense of pride).795

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794 Interview PSU [49] 2013.
795 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
6.5.2 Striking a balance between planning and doing – “water is like a lollipop, just an entry point!”

The annual work plan\textsuperscript{796} for the third financial year took as its starting point the – by now well-known and often repeated – commitment to take into consideration the new political situation of Nepal and the project’s operational context, in addition to reiterating its intention to “link the peace with the development process in order to prevent future conflicts.” And once again, the strive to ensure that the project would work in the interest of the peace process, respect Do No Harm principles, and comply with values and norms expressed in the Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs) was voiced. As was the case in the several prior occurrences of these commitments and intentions, no closer plans were disclosed in the third annual plan either on how this would be done.

As explained above, the project had previously defined its support to the national peacebuilding process in Nepal through the so-called Water Use Master Plan (WUMP) process, which was seen as reducing and solving specifically local water resource conflicts. Together with the third annual work plan, a concept paper was released on Water Use Master Planning. Here, a description was provided of the project’s rationale to prepare WUMPs before implementing any water related infrastructure activities. One of the principles mentioned in this connection served to link it to solving of source disputes and social conflicts, yet leaving undefined the link of the WUMPs to the broader notion of building peace:

Pro-active approach to solving various conflicts requires participatory planning within the community and between communities and cluster, between different interest groups, etc. Source disputes and social conflicts have jeopardized a big number of good projects when problems have been addressed too late or not at all...\textsuperscript{797}

Despite the fact that the WUMP process was elsewhere portrayed as having been designed precisely as a planning tool, an argument was voiced in the conclusion of the Water Use Master Plan concept paper for concentration on implementation\textsuperscript{798} instead of more planning. The reasoning behind this was linked to the fact that the


\textsuperscript{798} Implementation here refers to construction activities.
communities of Far Western Nepal had long been neglected from development mainstream and thus “rightly” expected concrete outputs from development projects. The concept paper argued that (too much) focus on planning would distance the project from people and their urgent demands.\footnote{Annual Workplan for Financial Year 3, 18.5.2008, Annex 12: Concept Paper on Water Use Master Planning.} This point was brought up also by an MLD official, who claimed in an interview:

> [Development] is very delayed in our context (laughs, as if stressing that this is common knowledge) … [thus] people want immediate results now! (Laughs again)

The importance of concrete results of project work was seen to be a crucial factor in building trust between the community and the project in Bhatakatiya too:

Local man: When the RVWRMP came here, we got some improvement to our lives because we got toilet construction, some water sources were found and we also got water supplies [taps near houses]. And some people have gotten jobs also.

Me: What about – you said earlier\footnote{Earlier in the discussion this group of Dalit men had told me that some NGOs that had come to Bhatakatiya in the name of development projects (before the conflict) had just come to the community, taken the names of the villagers and written a report to the donors without having actually done anything at all in the village. The men claimed that these NGOs had taken the money meant for development for themselves.} that there were donors who came here [before this project] and said that they were doing development projects, but in fact they were taking the money for themselves…? With that experience of development projects, how could you trust the RVWRMP people? That they would really do what they said that they would do?

Local man: People are becoming empowered now, and they got knowledge of development. When this project came [it] found that … all this area was polluted [dirty without sanitation] and bad smells were coming from this area. And when this project came, they got some change here [through the sanitation and water systems] – people began to think: “this is for us.”

Me: So it was the proof that something was actually happening that made you trust them?

Local man: Hajur, yes! [When we saw it] we thus came to trust that the project would do something for us – for development. We will worship it as our parents, this project! … And we want to give thanks to the Finnish
government because Finnida government has given more preference to the Dalits.\textsuperscript{801}

This perspective of gaining trust in the project through concrete action, described by the local man in Bhatakatiya, was confirmed in an e-mail communication I had with one of the Mangalsen office employees:

People of the VDC had thought that whatever NGOs, INGOs and project come in the areas are of similar types who just come and go but do nothing. T[hey thought] this RVWRMP is also [a] similar type of project [that] would come just and pretend to do something and go. So in the beginning of the project it was difficult to convince them that it is not such type of project. Only after providing them different type of capacity building trainings and implementing important schemes they were fully convinced about the project, nearly two years [later]. Such type of convincing problem was not due to only the decade of conflict… but also … to [the] long-term (40-50 years say) of development modality of government and non-government[al] organizations. There might be some effect of [the] decade of conflict in the beginning, but it did not remain[ ] long.\textsuperscript{802}

The new, and seemingly more laborious situation that had started to unfold after the ending of the violent open conflict contributed to the call of the concept paper to focus on implementation instead of more planning. That, combined with the heavy workload of the master planning system was perceived as more than enough:

Another 33 WUMPs of the current type and quality is not urgent for the people or for the project. RVWRMP has more than enough to do in the [current] 47 VDCs – implementation, consolidation of village level institutions [Water Resource Management Committees, Community Organizations, Water User Committees], capacity building, and last but not least in [relying] more and more on local bodies, local CBOs [Community based organizations] and government agencies (DTO, DAO, DISCO, etc.) [District Technical Offices, District Administrative Offices, DISCO, etc.]\textsuperscript{803}

Despite the call for more focus on doing versus planning, the preparation of water use master plans was found to be “participatory local planning at its best.” And community

\textsuperscript{802} E-mail correspondence Project office, Mangalsen 12.10.2014.
mobilization through training and institutionalization of community organizations – although more time-consuming than anticipated – was found to be crucial for truly participatory planning, local ownership and sustainability of built schemes:

It has been found that the community mobilisation carried out by [community mobilizers, support organizations] and project staff has greatly increased the people’s participation (especially women, Dalit and other [disadvantaged groups]) in [the] second round of WUMP preparation compared to the first. Local people are active and motivated…

The fact that people could discuss their needs and map and plan the use of their own resources through the water use master planning process was seen in the second annual report as giving them the opportunity to prioritize the planned activities on the local level. These activities were portrayed as greatly improving the feeling of ownership and reducing conflicts over the use of resources. This planning and prioritization of schemes by the beneficiaries themselves was said to keep people active and to ensure their participation in all activities as well as serving to decrease social problems or disputes during implementation.

Further perspectives on the notion of striking a balance between the “talk and the walk” was provided in discussions with PSU employees:

Water is just an entry point [to everything else]. If you go to the village without anything [concrete], nobody [will] believe you. After [bringing] water [close to their houses], you start to talk. They want to listen. If you just go and talk, nobody will listen. If you do something in the village, women will come, children will come … all people come. They want to hear, “what he said?” they will ask. Then after water you talk sanitation. If there’s no water, we should not talk about sanitation. If there’s no water, how [do] people clean? If water is nearby, then you talk about the kitchen garden: “okay, you grow the green vegetables – you can eat, you may be more healthy… then after… maybe [they will get] small income [from selling vegetables]. So water is just an entry point. But from water you can change many things. Like a lollipop (laughs, amused with his own allegory) – Just [like] if you want to talk with children, just give them sweets and they will come and you can talk [about] everything!

Me: Like a seed for the broader agenda?

PSU employee: Yes, you can talk [about] many things – you can talk livelihood if there’s water. No water, you cannot do anything.\textsuperscript{806}

Another former PSU employee also spoke about the need for striking a balance between actually doing concrete infrastructural work and awareness raising, tying his perspectives to the ongoing trend within the broader development community of placing emphasis on awareness raising and campaigning:

PSU employee: I believe… that there’s at least a greater chance that they [the locals] also continue the maintenance [of the constructed infrastructures] and that their capacities are increased just through being a part of the [actual work] – probably more than through just arranging certain trainings [awareness raising], which is what is being done all over… of course there’s the problem that the trained people then leave to go elsewhere and then… new trainings aren’t arranged, because usually no development projects follow up very long after [they’ve completed their work]… So that’s been developed in this project too; that there’s this post-construction phase where the [the communities] receive support after the completion of project construction work…

Me: Has it worked well?

PSU employee: I feel that it works quite well… the fact that the areas in which we are operating are developed thoroughly. On the other hand it’s been criticized on some level too: there’s a movement toward a more programmatic direction in Nepal in the water sector. Toward a sector program type [of] approach, which UNICEF for instance has been promoting. And in the sanitation sector in particular… there’s been critique about operating so strongly in certain VDCs, and not on the broader level, say on the district level. If you think about the sanitation side in particular, the idea there is that no physical support, or like financial support is provided for constructing the toilets… instead, it’s based on these campaigns.

Me: On awareness raising?

PSU employee: Yes, to get people to really internalize that it’s [sanitation is] an important thing, and in that way to get them to construct them [the sanitation systems] themselves, and only technical solutions are provided on how to construct toilets at a reasonable cost, for instance… But on the other hand it’s been good to operate concretely in certain areas… especially in the Far West… cause the point of departure there is so low, that there’s a

\textsuperscript{806} Interview PSU [7] 2008.
mound of work to do on every area [of development]. Of course a less 
intensive approach could work better in some other areas [with a slightly 
higher level of development].

Me: With less intensive you mean that there’s less actual physical 
construction?

PSU employee: Yeah…

…and there was this other effect too [in the construction approach of the 
project] that if someone from a neighboring VDC saw that these [kinds of 
sanitation systems] had been constructed here, it most definitely created the 
volition to construct some [similar systems] in their own VDC too. And on 
the toilet side especially it has worked – there’s been a bit of a competition 
[between the VDCs] there about announcing these “Open Defecation Free” 
areas.

Me: Yeah, [someone else] told me they called them “poop free areas.”

(Chuckle)

PSU employee: Yeah (chuckles) … it’s become a kind of popular movement 
– and it has spread quite fast…

Me: Yeah, it’s been interesting for me too – having a background in 
KEPA and the development cooperation NGO sector where the 
emphasis is so clearly on the necessity of changing un-just structures and 
raising awareness… and then when I visited Bhatakatiya in Achham in 2008 
and realized how absolutely poor the area was and that people really don’t 
have anything [material], it really made me humble. It felt good to see that 
there was an attempt to combine infrastructural construction to raising 
people’s awareness of sanitation issues.

PSU employee: Yeah… but really, in those kinds of places in the Far and 
Mid West – you have to do something [concrete] out there in the field too. It 
[change] doesn’t happen so fast if you just concentrate on improving 
administrative structures and such.

…

Me: Yeah, my understanding has also developed in this sense – looking at 
this project has really brought my feet to the ground in this respect too.

807 KEPA is the Service Centre for Development Cooperation, a Finnish umbrella organization of 
development NGOs.

808 Interview PSU [52] 2014.
6.6 Situation stabilized, yet disturbances expected to affect implementation

The project had started in late 2006 in a situation full of political hopes and uncertainties. The open conflict had just ended and the parties were seeking ways forward. In the second project year between mid 2007 and mid 2008 the project saw the situation in Nepal as having stabilized further: “… successful Constituent Assembly elections” had been held and a new government had been formed. Nevertheless, the project perceived the country as “undergoing an ‘interim’ period as the process of formulation of [a] new constitution [was] taking time and many of the major relevant policies …[were suspected to] be re-formulated once the new constitution [was] drafted.”

The changes in the project environment were “analy[zed in …[connection to the second annual report] through analyses of the assumptions and risks as first presented in the Project Document from 2004.” In this exercise, conducted at the project support unit level only, the assumptions and risks had been compared with “the actual situation in Nepal, in water sector and in the Project area in [the first and second financial year of the project]” The main risk identified for the project in the design phase with regard to the fragile operational context was the possibility of political instabilities causing delays and other problems to the project during its implementation. The corresponding assumption related to this risk was: “Project activities not to be unduly hampered by the security issues.” The “actual situation in Nepal” midway into the project in this regard was described as follows:

Situation 2007: Peace agreement signed but political violence and social disturbance continue.

Situation 2008: Elections held successfully and a government is formed. However, violent clashes between militias/supporters of parties are still occurring with fatal casualties. Confiscated land has not been returned. During FY2 around 45 days of national or local strike have reduced Project operations.

The conclusion of this analysis was that the original assumption made at the outset of the project was “still valid but some risk of political instability remains.” The report did not provide a description of the process, methods nor actors concerned in analyzing the operational context nor did it make explicit the chain of thought leading to the above conclusion. Further, the perspective of the analysis was on the national level of Nepal at large, leaving out closer inspection of the situations in the various project districts.

Just past the halfway post of the project, in connection to a proposal within the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs for additional funding for the project, the security situation in the project area was again determined as satisfactory:

Currently the security situation is satisfactory in terms of project implementation. In terms of the safety of project personnel, the most important factor is the approach of the project, which is based on water committees formed by local people.\footnote{Project Proposal ASA-10, 15.4.2009, UM 93.20 NEP, Nepal: Maaseudun vesi- ja sanitaatiohanke My translation.}

No explanation was provided within the proposal of how this security appraisal had been made; only that a Mid-term Review had recently been carried out on the project. As to the Mid-term Review, there were no requirements nor specifications included in the invitation to tender consultancy services nor in the terms of reference defined by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs regarding the fragile context or security situation in which the project was being conducted.\footnote{Invitation to Tender Consultancy Services, 24.9.2008, UM 93.20 NEP, Nepal: Maaseudun vesi- ja sanitaatiohanke, 2008)} In the winning tender by Hannu Vikman Consulting, the “dynamic situation in Nepal” was, however, mentioned as providing both opportunities and challenges to conducting the mid-term review. In addition to claiming to meet the requirements of the terms of reference, it was stressed in the consultant’s tender document that “[a]ll team members have conflict and post-conflict experience…” Moreover, the fragility of the project context was brought forth in a section of the proposal on the chosen methodology of the review:

The districts to be visited will be selected in collaboration with the Embassy of Finland and the [project] staff, taking into consideration access… prevailing security concerns and logistics.
…In light with the current socio-political context, the topic of inclusion is extremely important and will be specifically looked at during the mission.\textsuperscript{814}

According to the mid-term review, the project operated in “undeniably…difficult regions and in very difficult VDCs.”\textsuperscript{815} It discussed the politically challenging operational context of the project in the presentation of the project background and scope, pointing to changes in the project’s external environment: “There have been positive changes in Nepal…The conflict has ended, the Three Year Interim Plan 2007/08-2009/10 approved and adopted, Constituent Assembly elections held and a coalition cabinet formed.” According to the review team these changes had also been experienced in the project area, and the objectives, scope, approach and direction of the project had been backed up by “an impressive consensus among the main political parties.” The changes in the context were seen to have facilitated smoother implementation of the project “but not affected much yet;”\textsuperscript{816}

Recent development of national policies, strategies and plans has increasingly emphasized gender, social inclusion, development of local infrastructure, etc., making the Project even more relevant.

However, there is no “new situation” yet. Local government elections will not be held in the near future; instead, there are promises on the re-establishment of village and district councils by political parties on appointment basis. It will take time to have the new Constitution passed and the structure of the regional/federal/local administration in place.\textsuperscript{817}

Although the project had been enjoying broad political support across party lines – considered crucial in terms of smooth implementation in the absence of formally elected local bodies – the review found it to have been “affected by grass root level disturbances, such as strikes, road blocks, etc., which [had] restricted mobility and logistics and, thus, delayed implementation.” The conclusion of the review team on this was that “the political situation is still unstable and even more serious disturbances may be encountered.”\textsuperscript{818} These sentiments were as if an echo of an earlier statement

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\item \textsuperscript{814} Mid-term Review Tender, 17.10.2008, UM 93.20 NEP, Nëpali: Maaseudun vesi-ja sanitaatiohanke (Espoo: Hannu Vikman Consulting, 2008).
\item \textsuperscript{815} Mid-Term Review Final Report, March 2009, 31. My italics.
\item \textsuperscript{816} Mid-term Review Final Report, March 2009, UM 93.20 NEP, Nëpali: Maaseudun vesi-ja sanitaatiohanke (Espoo: Hannu Vikman Consulting, 2009) 1,15.
\item \textsuperscript{817} Mid-Term Review Final Report, March 2009, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{818} Mid-Term Review Final Report, March 2009, 17. My italics.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
concerning the project’s challenging operational context made by a representative of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs at the project’s third Steering Committee meeting already at the end of the first financial year:

Nepal is in a transition situation, elected local bodies are not in place, [and] consensus is necessary among local stakeholders. Also, village level capacity is low and innovative approaches are needed to overcome it. There will be lots of problems on the way...819

6.6.1 Infrastructure development – ‘business as usual'

The project support unit released a set of guidelines and operational manuals in December 2008 that had been prepared in support of execution of the activities funded under the District Water Resource Development Funds (DWRDF)820. The idea was that for the rest of the project's duration, all of its activities carried out in the various districts would follow these instructions provided in the Project Implementation Guidelines821, Step by Step Manual822, and several other documents giving instructions for monitoring823 on mandatory basis. This set of guidance documents was designed to ensure uniformity in implementation and to follow the process and procedures underlined in the Local Self Governance Act, 2055 and corresponding Regulations, 2056. It would also come to act as the basis of implementation for the subsequent second phase of the project starting in 2010.

The Project Implementation Guideline document consisted of definitions of the conditions for support and technological options, the scheme cycle of the project, as well as roles and responsibilities of project stakeholders; descriptions of the role of support organizations, processes and aims of human resource development, project funding and accounting mechanisms; and instructions for bookkeeping at the user committee level, for monitoring and evaluation as well as

819 Minutes of 3rd Steering Committee Meeting, 8.10. 2007, UM 93.20 NEP, Nepal: Maaseudun vesi- ja sanitatutankke (Kathmandu: Ministry of Local Development, 2007).

820 The DWRDFs were established under each District Development Committee of each of the project districts.


823 Water Use Master Plan/Environmental Sanitation Scheme monitoring formats 1-3 for monitoring visits; WUMP Post-Construction monitoring format for 4th monitoring visit; Monitoring formats for sanitation & gravity.
operation and maintenance. The Step-by-Step Manual in turn gave detailed descriptions, guidelines and models for carrying out the scheme cycle process adopted in the project. Its guidance was meant for user committees, support organizations, District Development Committees, District Management Committees as well as other district level stakeholders and project staff in carrying out the project activities in a standardized, comprehensive and systematic manner. The manual was arranged into 16 steps beginning from VDC selection and ending with post-construction activities, and included all together 80 different guidance papers giving detailed models and instructions for carrying out activities in the project implementation process. The guidance provided through this vast collection of documents was described as having a strong link to the previous Finnish – Nepali long-term water and sanitation project:

[it] capitalizes on the 15 years experience of the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Support Program in Lumbini zone … and has been reviewed during the 2 first years of implementation of the RVWRMP.\textsuperscript{824}

Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Support Programme (RWSSSP)…(three phases from 1989-2004) had produced extensive training modules and methodology[,] which can be replicated after minor adaptation to reflect the specificity of RVWRMP.\textsuperscript{825}

A broad spectrum of contributors was said to have enriched especially the guidance of the Step-by-Step Manual, with engineers, social scientists and information management specialists contributing to the effort. Also feedback from local users committees and support organizations had been included. Finally, the “recent socio-political focus of decentralization, gender promotion and inclusion of disadvantaged groups” was said to have shaped many elements in the guidance.

This vast set of detailed guidance, instructions and monitoring formats, consisting of some 470 pages (including annexes), gives very little if any indication of any of it relating to the implementation of a development project in a fragile or conflict-affected context. I found only a few deviations from this main observation. Much in line with what had already been established in the earlier project documentation up until December 2008, this set of guidance gave instructions to confirm in the preparatory phase of the project that “there are no disputes relating to the water rights in the community”\textsuperscript{826}; to

\textsuperscript{824} Ibid.


define the resolution of water resource related or other social disputes as the responsibility of Water Resources Management Committees\textsuperscript{827}; to “address [and resolve] any problems that have arisen during construction” in connection to progress and (post-) construction reviews\textsuperscript{828}; and to ensure clarity in financial reporting as it “prevents conflicts and leads to increased trust among stakeholders”.\textsuperscript{829} In addition to this, conflict mitigation, mediation and problem solving skills were mentioned as a necessary requirement for support organization staff\textsuperscript{830}; and finally, political neutrality was expected of community mobilizers\textsuperscript{831} as was “freedom from political squabbling” of user committee representatives\textsuperscript{832}. The guidance documents did not define any criteria for the conflict management capacities called for, nor for indicators of political squabbling. There was also no description of or reasoning for, nor indicators on how to ensure political neutrality.

6.6.2 Lack of competent human resources and local accountability

One of the most common and serious problems found to affect the progress of the project in general, and in particular the quality assurance of project construction, was the lack of technically competent staff within District Technical Offices as well as in the support organizations assigned to assist with project implementation in the Village Development Committees.\textsuperscript{833} The project’s expectation at the outset was that the support organizations, as service providers, would have qualified and competent staff to provide the skills necessary for project implementation to the beneficiary communities.\textsuperscript{834} One of my research participants from the project’s support unit spoke on this at length in our discussion about the project:

This project did have a fairly strong project structure [which is criticized by some], but on the other hand the area has been so difficult and remote that it wouldn’t have been possible to act there… with… a more ‘hands-off’

\textsuperscript{833} Mid-Term Review Final Report, March 2009, 17.
\textsuperscript{834} Mid-Term Review Final Report, March 2009, 28.

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approach... surely it wouldn’t have been possible to achieve the same things... I mean there is still now a clear idea that at the point when we are leaving, that we should be able to hand over the responsibility properly to the local administration. And of course... the ideal situation would in any case be that the locals would themselves be able to do more... [And] that the project would be... in a way the one verifying, and [providing] technical support and then monitoring the whole thing, and like this. But out there in the Far West it’s just so weak... the local administration and also the... local NGOs and... entrepreneurs who are [working on the project]. So in this case the project was actually compelled to do... more and [have a] stronger [role]. [To be] present in –just as an example– the implementation of the entire water system on every single level.

... technically there really wasn’t any real capacity to speak of...[and the NGOs that were] there were more of the training and social mobilization type of actors.

Me: Would you say that this was the case in just about all of the ten project districts?

PSU employee: Well, let’s say that Kailali shouldn’t be calculated at all into the same [group], cause it’s there on the Terrai and completely different... but the nine hill districts, let’s say – (pondering, stretching the words)

Me: Categorically?

PSU employee: I don’t recall exactly, but almost – like there were none such [technically qualified actors] anywhere. At least apart from just a few... that were technically good enough... NGOs that could have properly invested on that side [of the project work]. We did choose some in the beginning, but I think in the end we had to hire some more technical personnel for the project, so that they could support the technical planning and the supervise implementation...835

The approach of using local NGOs as support organizations had been widely adopted by development actors in Nepal during the conflict: in times of tension and insecurity, local NGOs had often been the only ones with access to local communities. The mid-term review noted that using local NGOs as service providers also built their capacity by providing opportunities for learning through working and experience, thus making them also “project beneficiaries to a certain extent.” Simultaneously the project was seen as boosting the development of the local and regional service

835 Interview PSU [52] 2014.
market. For these reasons the review team did not find any reason to change this relationship between the project and the local NGOs. It did, however express a concern about the more experienced NGOs becoming overburdened, as many of them were found to be working for almost all projects possible in their area, and thus stretching their resources too thin.

The support organizations themselves explained their inability to attract and retain technical staff by the gaps between the various steps in the contracts between the project and the said organizations. I got a feel for this during my stay in Bhatakatiya too, as I explained to one of my research participants during the same discussion quoted above:

Me: How about the kind of perspective I heard of in Bhatakatiya: there was this technical …guy from the local support organization out in the field for the same 10-11 day period that I was there… I asked him about his future plans and how he had come to work in the project. I recall that it came out little by little during the course of our stay there – he was careful [at first] and [a] slightly shy person, but as he came to trust me – he started to say that “well, he didn’t know [about his plans in the project] because he had such a short contract.”… I of course understand the perspective of this kind of implementing agency like FCG that the local capacity is weak – but on the other hand there’s this other side, the perspective of the local people?

PSU employee: It was indeed a … problem that was acknowledged at some point and then it was changed. In the beginning the support organizations were always hired for a certain phase of the project at a time. So the whole organization thus had short contracts. But then we realized that it’s a problem for them [the SOs] to hold on to good people because of [the short contracts]. So I think now there’s [a system] where not just one but several projects are combined into a ‘bundle’ – and one support organization is hired [to take care of all of them] on longer term. So they have a multiple year contract, and thus the idea is that they can hire good people who can then support several projects at once… it has been improved like that…

Me: Do you remember at all when this was? …

PSU employee: Well, it was being discussed at the time [of your visit (2008)]… I remember, now that you asked about it, that this was one of the improvements we made… [and] I think that it may have been helpful in the

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838 Mid-Term Review Final Report, March 2009, 17.
839 Interview SO, PRSDC [34] 2008 and research journal.
sense ... of the support organizations being able to hire and hold on to competent persons, because then it’s possible at least to make a proper contract with them. [I mean] no one who is really good has the stamina to stay in those jobs. And probably it’s also a question about those who really are good, they apply – maybe the next step for them is to... apply for jobs in the bigger project or some other donor project, and after that out of the area and to some other region. I figure that most of them have more or less a calling toward Kathmandu (chuckles). [My guess is that] few are that committed to their own area; that if the opportunity rose, that they would just continue [working] locally. \(^{840}\)

There were other explanations for the lack of competent human resources as well. Some of the alternative reasons for this that I found in my dataset were related to the project contexts being in extremely remote areas: districts that had suffered from long-term exclusion and underdevelopment, and been heavily affected by the conflict. These factors were explained as having all contributed to an outflow of competent people into more developed areas and lucrative jobs. Some participants of this study also explained in interviews that the project area in the Mid and Far West was considered by many as a “punishment post” from which competent people eagerly wanted to move on. This had contributed to a high turnover in especially local administration personnel needed for project implementation, thereby in many cases leading to delays in the progress of the project.\(^{841}\) In addition to the shortage of qualified technical staff among support organizations and District Technical Offices, the project was found by the mid-term review team to have been impeded by “limited resources, ownership and motivation of some of the District Development Committees, and a lack of local accountability in the absence of elected bodies…”\(^{842}\)

PSU employee: It’s challenging there in that everything is so terribly weak there in the Far West, cause… the local NGOs are weak and the local administration is really bad – and nobody really likes it that they end up being sent there (chuckles) – because it’s a bit of a punishment post ...

Me: Yes, I’ve heard that before… In particular the locals think that way?

PSU employee: Yes, yes exactly these local administration [people do]. Part of these people working [for the local administration] have been recruited locally. But then there are those who are in decision-making positions – they

\(^{840}\) Interview PSU [52] 2014.


\(^{842}\) Mid-Term Review Final Report, March 2009, 17.
are the ones that are circulated around the country and... if they come into disagreement with someone [on the central government level] they get sent to some really remote area (chuckles) – and then they don’t want to be there.

Me: Wasn’t that a bit of a problem [during the project], that they actually weren’t present there in [in the project areas]?

PSU employee: Yes, one of the big problems indeed was that [especially] in the most remote districts they weren’t there a big part of the time.

Me: So it has continued all along?

PSU employee: It has continued, yes – So [what typically happens] when the Local Development Officer for instance – who’s supposed to be the one who signs all the decisions in the project – gets away from the assigned district for some task elsewhere, they don’t seem to want to go back at all.

Me: Oh, you mean [they leave their assigned post] just for some event or something...?

PSU employee: Yes. There are these rules... that they have to get permission from the ministry to leave their assigned area.

Me: Oh? That’s almost worse – it’s almost as if they were in prison and then they just get some special time off, or something?

PSU employee: Well yes, but it’s the same for all districts. But it’s always like that in those [remote] places. It’s always that they think of something more and more [to do away from their post], that they just don’t come back and they’re not present. And then ... quite often they haven’t clearly defined who the deputy is, and then if they’re away for a while [everything comes to a standstill]

Me: Uhum – and there’s quite a turnover then? At least from what I’ve found in the project documentation...at one point in going through the documents for Achham, which is the tip of my case study, there are quite a few names there [on the local administration level]...it seems that the persons have changed quite frequently.

PSU employee: Yes, there is a circulation system. But in principle it shouldn’t happen that often. But then if there are changes, for instance in the [national] government, then they do always circulate [people]. As they want their own supporters into certain positions...

Me: What is the frequency of the turnover then?
PSU employee: I don’t actually know [for sure]…but in practice it’s always been that way that whenever there’s been some change in the central government, people change. So in practice it’s probably been – almost annually. Something like that… and the fact that they change, it’s of course hard for a project like this, where the local counterpart in principle is exactly the LDO and the head of the District Technical office – and once you get the first people onboard into the project, then they change and you have to explain everything to the new people: that “this is what we’re trying to do here…” Because after all it’s important that they’re in some way committed… I mean they are… in a terribly busy, and kind of a double role, the LDOs, cause there’re no elected local administration. So they in a way also act as the chairmen of the whole district; whereas they really should just be administrators and there should be that elected district level administration who would be responsible. But now they have to attend to all of these – when there’s any event or function [in which district representation is needed], they just run from one event to the next – so they don’t have the time.

Me: And the situation is still the same?

PSU employee: The situation has been the same for over ten years.843

843 Interview PSU [52] 2014.
6.7 Contextual challenges on the rise: over 50 days of strikes hamper implementation, hiring decisions accompanied with intense pressure from interest groups, “aggressive fights” here and there

In the beginning [of the project] it was extremely peaceful in the area…when the peace was achieved – and even the elections of 2008 went really well and there was a kind of togetherness and sense of common spirit… and [subsequently] it went back to there being more and more…fragmentation in the political space in Nepal…When certain Tharu-groups and movements came out in recent years, there were the worst strikes ever. The [project] offices all had to be shut down for a month – at first they [the project staff] tried to be in the offices [and continue work]…but they [the protestors] had almost physically come in, so everything had to be locked up, nothing could work there…But of course that too as been part of a kind of broader – and the project had no part in it, or creating the situation. But certainly on a smaller scale in…villages…I can’t think of anything [as an example]… but one always has to [make choices] and prioritizations for example about what will be constructed and what won’t, so there’s always the chance that someone may be able to influence [those decisions] in a way that someone else may feel that one groups’ interests have been set above another’s, or something toward that end.845

Coming to the end of its third implementation year, there was a clear rise in awareness within the project about the fact that it was operating “in a unique and challenging environment.”846 The changes in the project environment had been analyzed in the same fashion as the year before, through an appraisal of the validity of the assumptions and risks as first presented in the original Project Document from 2004. As before, there was no explanation of the process, methods or actors concerned in analyzing the operational context, nor was the chain of thought leading to the conclusion made explicit. Also the perspective of the analysis was again on the national level of

844 Tharus are said to be one of the most numerous (and diverse) ethnic minorities of Nepal with around one million persons classified as speakers of Tharu as their mother tongue, and/or as Tharu. Gisèle Krauskopf, “The Anthropology of the Tharus: An Annotated Bibliography,” CNRS, Paris, http://www.macalester.edu/~guneratne/Teaching/tharus.html (accessed 05/07, 2015).

845 Interview PSU [52] 2014.

Nepal without any attention given to the local situations in the various project districts.

The main risk identified for the project in 2004 in terms of the fragile operational context was the possibility of political instabilities causing delays and other problems to the project during its implementation. The corresponding assumption related to this risk had been that project activities would not be “unduly hampered by the security issues.” The third annual project report described the situation in this regard as follows:

Situation in 2009:

Political instability remains after PM [Prime Minister’s] resignation. During FY3 [Financial Year 3] over 50 days of strikes have hampered Project operations.  

In the midst of reporting on progress within a difficult operational context, a sense of pride was voiced in the annual report about the project’s ability to effectively operationalize an integrated water resources management paradigm at district and local level, and systematically mainstream crosscutting policies such as the gender and social inclusion (GESI) policy:

…there are a number of impacts and lessons learned to be identified, documented and shared at the national and also international level for further policy dialogue. 

An example of the challenges posed to the project from its context was the intense pressure regarding in particular hiring decisions in the Terai:

…Kailali-based interest groups in Dhangadhi are pressing PSU [the Project Support Unit] to increase the relative number of local staff from Terai, and any hiring process is accompanied with intense interest from these groups.

The annual report for the third year of the project also reported an increase in the occurrence of bandhas as having caused a challenge to project implementation:

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849 Ibid.
850 A bandh (also spelled as bandha or banda) – also a Nepali word for ‘closed’ – is a form of protest and described in the annual report as the most typical way of demonstration in Nepal. Most often bandhas are said to result in the closing down of markets within a city, or in closing of roads or
In everyday life a growing number of bandhas causes lots of troubles to project via delays and shutdowns of PSU...Bandhas have been hampering the work of RVWRMP [from] the early on but in [Financial Year 3] the frequency of incidents was all-time high, over 50 days of strikes have hampered Project operations.\footnote{Annual Report, Financial Year 3, 7.9.2009, 16.}

In addition to the increase in bandhas and incidents in the Terai region, \textit{all kinds of situations surfaced in a majority of the other project districts too}. One former PSU employee spoke of the challenges of local pressures and bad conduct toward the project at length, referring to them as “aggressive fights:”

Well yeah, well we...had these aggressive fights here and there [in the project]. In one place the LDO\footnote{LDO = Local Development Officer, a governmental official and member of the District Management Committee (DMC).} disappeared at three [o'clock] in the morning, with his jacket collars pulled up – he left the district and refused to go back... In one district they threatened to lock our guys into the house and to burn it down. In another district they chased [project actors] with sticks in their hands, ... I mean really aggressive kinds of reactions. It occurred to me that they really do have quite poor negotiation skills if they imagined that we want to continue cooperation with these kinds [of people]! \footnote{Emphasis added.}

Me: Mm?

PSU employee: And then they admit themselves in [subsequent] businesslike discussions – when I went around conducting these kinds of crisis discussions explaining what the situation really is and why every one is mad at each other and why the LDO didn’t want to pay them and all of this – so they admitted themselves even that “yeah, we weren’t there and we didn’t do it [the work agreed on]”

Me: (Chuckle, in a sense of disbelief)

PSU employee: But they \textit{really} imagined that since they had been doing this for the past ten years, that if there is a valid contract, that payments would be made whether or not they actually \textit{did} anything!\footnote{Earlier in the discussion this research participant had explained how in a certain district the LDO had refused to pay the local support organization for their services because they had found out that the SO had not actually done the work mandated to them, but just written a report on it.}
This same research participant explained how the project experienced pressure not only in the form of letters and negative media publicity, but also as face-to-face blackmailing and threatening of project employees, leading to a tightening of security protocol at the project support unit and offices:

Me: You spoke about threat letters to the project before – did the threats come mainly in letters then?

PSU employee: No. That was just it – you know, when these pressure groups just pop up in people’s homes in the middle of the night! Not very nice –

Me: Okay – (quietly, stretching the word)

PSU employee: And there were some that came to our office even. One time some supposed delegation had been there. They had gone through all of the employee’s rooms except for the management and …expats… So these blackmailing [cases] in the office – well (stretching the word) after that we closed the gate and things changed a bit. We weren’t as “open-doored” as we had been earlier.

Me: Mm?

PSU employee: Yeah, but it was really like – face-to-face threatening as well. But to the team leader the threats came as letters… There were calls or going to people’s homes at night and such. Or in the field when [our staff] stayed over night in guest houses, so there too [there were threats].

6.7.1 Voluntary incident reporting

I had read and heard of quite a few stories during my research process about various incidents and challenges to the project stemming from the context. This made me curious about the project’s reactions and responses to these troubles:

Me: Hey, how about (thoughtfully) – you were telling me about the challenges and problems during …the project – so I was wondering if you had some kind of incident reporting system? I noticed that it was mentioned in the trimester report of the last year of the project that incidents were documented in some way. But there wasn’t anything more specific on that –?

855 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
PSU employee: Yeah, we had this template for it, which was supposed to help the reporting. And we got this part included [in the format] where you could mark if it was confidential or just for information, and so on. But this was related to the situation some years back…when we had a lot of different strikes and road blocks and all kinds of money gathering and straight out blackmailing, (laughs, then continues seriously) – so we received a lot of those kinds of incident reports. And of course especially related to these squabbles with these NGOs; about them coming and threatening – and so on. So we had that type of reporting. And accidents of course. But there were less of those, maybe one a year – type – so I’d say they were mostly related to money gathering, blackmailing and threat calls. \footnote{Interview PSU [57] 2014.}

After getting confirmation in this interview that there had been an incident reporting system in the project, I asked for access to the these reports through my contacts in the project organization. A set of four individual incident reports was sent to me as examples of “typical or more interesting cases.” The feelings of fear and anxiety were tangible in them, exemplified well in this report by a water resource adviser from one of the project districts:

(Section in report discussing problems faced): They [local support organizations] are … threatening [us at the project over the] telephone even during the mid night. A team of 3 members visited our office and gave threatening that if DDC will not pay all contract amounts to them they will lock DDC and RVWRMP office, break table and chairs and attack physically. They also threaten that WRA should be responsible for those entire attempt… I tried to convince them about the roles and responsibilities of DDC, SOs and the Project working modalities. I also humbly requested them to wait till LDO return back to [the district]. I tried to assure[ ] them that there will be a DMC meeting immediately after the arrival of LDO… and finalize the issues of SOs with common consensus. However, they were not in a mood to listen my suggestion. (Section in report discussing help needed): Clear guidance from their (GoN) higher authority and RVWRMP National Project Coordinator and NPD\footnote{National project director.} should be given to LDO. If DMC\footnote{District management committee.} could not resolve the problem, all the responsibilities will be on me and I could not tolerate the incidence. In that situation, RVWRMP/PMT\footnote{Project management team.} should consider my transfer to another project district. If the DDC did not
pay all the cost of SOs up to this period (even to their non contract/work period) all the blame would be on [me]. It is said that the SOs & political party cadre can attack me at any time.860

The incident reporting template used by the project asked for a full chronological description of the incident, and requested for a definition of it’s nature as divided into three categories: natural disaster (earthquake, fire, flood, landslide, storm); social conflict (bandha, demonstration/riot, road block, theft/burglary, threat/blackmail); and other. Further it asked to identify the parties/organizers (if any) of the incident, as well as for information on what the rapporteur had done about it. There were also questions about what kind of help was needed to solve the incident; how it had or was foreseen as influencing the project or its actors; and what verbal or oral information had been gathered about the case. Finally, there was a set of questions asking about decisions taken and reasons/justification for them; lessons learned from the incident and identification of failure of procedures or staff, as well as recommendations for remedial or disciplinary actions (if any).861

I failed to find further information in my dataset of any kind of analysis of the content of the incident reports. I did learn later on during my discussion with the same former project employee, however, that the use of the incident reporting system was voluntary for the project’s staff, and that the reports or information contained in them had been selectively sent to the national BOG Secretariat and/or the Finnish Embassy:

Me: So you documented these [threats and pressuring] in to the incident reporting system?

PSU employee: Well, it was only if the people concerned wanted … to do so.

Me: So it was up to them then what and if anything was documented and what not?

PSU employee: Yes. …also the BOGs Secretariat asked that they would be informed of these. Because they tried to stay on top of how much of such activity was going on out there in the field. So [we reported on incidents] to some extent. And of course we always sent to the Embassy what was possibly relevant. But there was very little – there weren’t that many of them.

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861 The information about the incident reporting format described here has been drawn from a set of four individual reports from Baitadi, Bajura, Dailekh and Humla that I received from the project.
Me: Yeah, yeah.

PSU employee: There were clearly certain phases when things somehow intensified.862

6.7.2 Consistent replies and Basic Operational Guidelines as a shield

One of the unwritten rules adopted by the project in responding to any kinds of pressuring, threats, blackmailing or the kind, was that all attempts to exercise influence on the project were answered, and most often by quoting the Basic Operational Guidelines (BOGs):

PSU employee: You’ve seen what’s in the BOGs?

Me: Yes.

PSU employee: So you know the list of what – ten or fifteen points?

Me: Yes.

PSU employee: Yes? Yeah, well always when we got one of these odd threat or pressure letters – whether it was about recruiting someone or that we should give money for something, or a member of our staff had been blackmailed to pay something. Or … [what ever], … [we] had this principle that [we] always answered every letter. Whether it was from the judo-department of the Maoist youth association that approached us –

Me: (Chuckle)

PSU employee: – about the need to get a new laptop for their office, or who ever. So [we] would send a very formal letter on our official letterhead to them. And the BOGs were always included. And then [we] would always quote in the text: “as you see in the BOGs, this is not possible –” ha-ha-ha (laughing with a seeming sense of triumph) “what you are asking for.” So in that way we used the BOGs really systematically.

… At some point quite a few of these letters were sent out. But [we] had this principle that [we] always answered them in a very dry and matter-of-fact way and with the official letterhead and stamp. You know, in a respectful

862 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
way: “okay, you have this agenda and you need money or you need this and that, but it just won’t do” (chuckles).  

Some of my research participants representing the project support unit and project staff on the district level had mentioned more or less in passing that the BOGs were present in project vehicles and hung on office walls. It is possible that I was not quite tuned in enough to make note of this during my visit to the project in 2008, but I do not recall observing BOG documents pasted to the walls or in the project vehicles that I travelled in. One of the project’s former employees explained to me in detail, however, that it was in particular toward the end of the project that the Basic Operational Guideline document had been an important tool in responding to tensions. It served project actors as a kind of shield with which they could fairly easily protect the project and themselves against unreasonable or unjustified demands:

PSU employee: Our aim was to protect our own staff with [responding to all threats and pressures], because most of the threats weren’t directed at the foreign employees. Nobody ever came to the foreign staff members and said that I’ll burn your house, instead [these kinds of threats] were directed specifically at the local staff…so [we] tried to make sure that… our own staff – that it was under protection (chuckles, maybe conveying unease at the topic?) – that this BOGs thing really is meant to protect all of us, and not just Finns, for example (chuckles again). All [project] employees also had a pocket version of it with them, so they could present it to possible pressure groups or blackmailers, [and say] that “this is what it says here, so we can’t!” It was also in the windows of our cars and on office walls and everywhere where we could [possibly] get it visible. On our [PSU] office gate and on the walls and everywhere!

… So that’s how we used them, and the idea of course was that – on the bottom [of the document] there are the logos of several donors and countries…[So] the power of the BOGs was in the fact that if one of the [signatory] donors got into trouble and… would have to leave the district [it was working in], everyone would leave. So the BOGs had… the power of the entire donor community behind it.

Me: Uhum?

863 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
PSU employee: You’ve seen all of the signatories at the bottom of the BOGs [document]?

Me: Yes – wasn’t Finland one of the original signatories working on it?

PSU employee: Yes! And that’s how we used them and thereby we also promoted an image of ourselves: that we are not here on any political party’s account. We are also not here with our own agenda, but for the sake of the poor people. And our cars are not here to be driven by everyone. We don’t carry weapons, we don’t give money, other than for professional purposes – and even then only through work plans, and so on. So we could lean on the clauses [of the BOGs document], because they were so clearly stated… And the BOGs were also translated into at least five or six different local languages, so there were several Nepali versions, or these other languages.

6.7.3 The team leader’s crude anti-donation memo

In addition to the policy adopted of formally answering any demands and threats toward the project, an additional ad hoc tool emerged with which project staff was able to fend off unjustified requests for “donations” from the project. This tool was a memo that one of the team leaders had written in response to a local newspaper article about the project paying illegal roadblock fees:

Team leader: I wrote this memo – that they [our staff] apparently then carried around in their pockets out there when in the field… – in which I pretty much with cruel wording ordered that no such payments may be paid to anyone, and that the first one to give out a “donation” will be fired!

Me: Ha-ha-ha (break out laughing in response to the fierce tone of this story).

Team leader: Ha-ha-ha (laughs with me and/or at herself?). So then they used this memo written and signed by me out there, like: “you see, if I pay you, you’ll have to find me a new job!” Ha-ha (chuckles in amusement) – that had worked quite well.

Me: Okay – so did the employees think of it themselves that they decided to start carrying it around? Or had you agreed on it together – or had you intentionally ordered that they should start taking it along with them?

865 Interview PSU [57] 2014. Similar views were shared also in interviews PSU [52, 48] and Mangalsen [53].
Team leader: Well, I got really irritated about this newspaper article that was published in the local paper in Dhangadhi before these guys [staff members] had even told me anything. But they had been at this roadblock somewhere – and the passengers had refused to pay anything, and eventually the driver had had to pay. So what do you know: there was some journalist who came to take pictures of the event and then they advertised in the big Dhangadhi paper that “RV pays roadblock fees!”

Me: Okay?

Team leader: And so I got really upset about it – and I gave them [staff members concerned] pretty bad [harsh] feedback on their conduct. First of all no one and nowhere and under no circumstances does anybody pay anything. And if even just one person pays anyone once and there will be a perception that RV pays, it will have a direct repercussion to another 200 persons, including our NGO partners and all these who are out in the field; the ones who are approached all the time. So… under no circumstances can that kind of thing happen! And nobody can slide from this rule. So I thought that I’ll write a slightly coarse memo: “heck, the next one who pays, goes!” (Chuckles).

Me: Okay!

Team leader: Ha-ha (chuckles, as if laughing at herself) – but it did seem to protect them – that they walked around with that note in their pockets and presented it to these money collectors: “This is what’ll become of me if I pay!” Ha-ha-ha (chuckles)

Me: That’s just great! Gosh, that’s really good, ha-ha-ha (joining in the laughing), really good!  

6.8 Explanation of the link between project and peacebuilding emerges

As opposed to what had merely been insinuated in earlier project documentation, the link between the project’s work and its contribution to building peace was discussed explicitly in the third annual report. In a section of the report on the project’s “support to the peace building process,” a more distinct explanation started to take shape.

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866 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
The conflict in Nepal started in 1996 in Mid-Western Nepal, and since then both Mid and Far Western Nepal were the hot spots of conflict that eventually spread … throughout the country. *The root cause of the Nepal conflict is a complex web of interacting factors.* Studies have identified its root causes as traditional deep-seated political, economic and social exclusion of large parts of the population, based on class, caste, gender, ethnicity, religion, language and geographical isolation. All *these continue to be relevant issues in all working districts and VDCs* [Village Development Committees], and overall, the legacy [of the conflict] can still be felt in practically all project working areas.867

*The project’s approach* (based on principles of good governance and democratic and transparent procedures, coupled with the choice to recognize all political parties active in an area as key stakeholders of the project) *was offered as an explanation of the way in which the project already had, and would continue to contribute to post-conflict peace consolidation and consensus building in its working districts.* Also the transparent financial processes used, as well as the gender and social inclusion policy developed and mainstreamed in the framework of the project were portrayed as contributing toward building a more fair society: “Hence, RVWRMP [the project] directly addresses many of the root causes [of the conflict].”868 As was described earlier in this narrative in connection to discussing the local water use planning system, the theme of *transparency* came up in my discussions with research participants in particular from the project support unit.

Me: You speak strongly about… transparency, and it seems to be something that comes out clearly from the project documentation too. But also from my discussions with others – in looking for an answer to what gave life and what made this project really flourish – I’m hearing about it. That it’s been a central feature – this transparency?

PSU employee: Yes, definitely! That and in general the themes of corruption and cheating – you can cause so many different types of conflict with those. These are things that we need to concentrate on the whole time.

Me: Yes?

PSU employee: And this again [reveals the] value to *being present* here in the field; that we try to promote the view of it being in everybody’s interest to show all accounts publicly and conduct all procurements and recruitments in a transparent way. This [functions] in a way as a good example to others too

– because in this country, as you know how these things go – I don’t recall if it was from Transparency International, that Nepal has gotten worse in this respect or had it gotten better, but in any case this country is at the tail end of those indexes. Yeah.\textsuperscript{869}

Further, at the local level, the participatory process of the water use master plans as well as the so-called Step-by-Step approach were described at this juncture as the “operational tools for contributing to peace building process.”\textsuperscript{870}

These participatory and transparent processes enhance the coherence, organization and activeness of communities through community mobilization, capacity building, institutionalization of community organization[s], improving livelihoods and by supporting the communities in implementing their priority schemes.\textsuperscript{871}

Local ownership and transparency, linked with participation were brought up in my discussion with one research participant about the reasons of success of the project:

Me: What are the reasons for successes in this project?

PSU employee: … the people, the beneficiaries are the key stakeholders of the project. They are the main owners, who manage all by themselves. We, the project planner[s] or others…the NGOs, we are just facilitators. Not directly involved in the implementation. The main owners are the users. And the user’s committees are the managers, who can manage on their own – this is one key issue – a key factor in the success. Another point is more transparency.

…people know how much money is coming in for this project, from where. The user’s committee is more involved, [they] manage all financial issues also. Because Finnish foreign aid comes to Nepal on the district level. In the DDC we have one fund, an account – when the agreements are signed, the money goes directly to the user committees. The DDC will not buy the material. Money goes directly to the user committee’s account. So there is also a public audit, social audit. When the user’s committee buys the material, they hold a meeting: “okay, we bought material – cement this much, xx this much, transportation this much” – And people will know how

\textsuperscript{869} Interview PSU [57] 2014. Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{870} Annual Report, Financial Year 3, 7.9.2009, 41.
\textsuperscript{871} Annual Report, Financial Year 3, 7.9.2009, 41.
much money we get. Transparency is most important. Even for example in the family – if one is handling the money, if he can’t explain [his use of the money] … but if you say very clearly, everybody trusts! [Even] if you work very honestly, but if you don’t say, or communicate – or [there] is no transparency – people think maybe something is wrong. The key factor, the key issue is transparency.

Me: Do you see a connection between transparency and ownership then? You were talking about this earlier…?

PSU employee: Yeah, yeah - … in the beginning of this project the technical team made the design. People sit together, the women sit together and discuss the tap location. There is no [predetermined] order. People decide themselves where their tap should be located. This project is not Finnida’s project, not the government’s project, it’s their project. So they are the owner, they are the manager, so they have to decide. We are only supporting.

Me: Making it possible?

PSU employee: Yeah, yeah. So that is also one part. To involve the people and the community in all the decision-making processes.

Me: And that, in a way, is the “social revolution” that you mentioned before? Because they are not used to doing this, to participating and making decisions on their own and together, isn’t it?

PSU employee: Yes!

Also, the point of introducing negotiation skills for solving local water conflicts – part of defined project activities from the start – was stressed in the third annual report as enhancing the capacity of local actors “to plan their development in a way that will not cause further conflicts.” On the other hand, the third annual report referred elsewhere to the so-called WUMP Review team’s work, which had disclosed that only about half of the 8 consultant firms employed to compile the water use master plans in the project districts had been able to produce reports that were of a satisfactory level, contributing on their part to a lack of trust toward these project actors. Among a longer list of shortcomings concerning the WUMP reports issues related to

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874 Shortcomings listed included things such as inconsistent data and analysis; missing or copied demographic data from another VDC than which the report concerned; as well as mismatches between setting of priorities in the WUMP report and what had been decided during field work.
source conflicts were said to have been dealt with by the WUMP consultants “very generally, [and] not tied into VDCs in question.”

In addition to the emphasis on developing negotiation skills and local capacities for water conflict resolution, the report claimed that by addressing discrimination, poverty and inequality through its activities, the project relates

…directly…to the root causes of the conflict and hence…supports the peace building process more broadly [than by] “just” focusing on water conflicts.

Finally – also within the framework of the third annual report, in connection to a discussion about the project dealing with water rights and the potential of utilizing a human rights approach – a claim was made that the project had “appl[ied] do-no-harm and conflict sensitive approaches.” In addition to this brief assertion, the report did not provide any further explanation as to how these approaches had been applied. It stated only that the project “encourages participation of local people in the design and implementation of its programs; aiming to ensure equal access to the facilities and other.”

In contrast to the claim of the annual report about the use of these approaches, one former PSU employee exclaimed in an ex post project discussion we had about the notion of Do No Harm:

It was probably [a] phrase that was used in the bidding [documents] of the first phase of the project… [but] I didn’t use the term so much myself, because clearly we aren’t there to cause any harm! Ha-ha-ha (laughs).

The above quote suggests that the notion of Do No Harm may have on the one hand been used as a tactical term in the bidding phase of the project. On the other hand it speaks on the limited understanding of this research participant of the notion as being restricted to merely aiming not to cause further harm.

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878 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
6.9 “Local manifestations of the past conflict” come to the fore: lack of trust culminates in aggressive newspaper writing and direct threats to project staff

Some three years after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord, and just less than a year away from completion, the project was faced with repercussions of the past conflict. Since it’s beginning, the project had been experiencing at times heavy individually and politically motivated pressures and lobbying related to staff recruitments in particular. Yet, the incidents that took place in the last project year seemed to have taken the project by surprise:

While [the project] has rightly focused on its working communities, it has previously been ignoring the local manifestations of the past conflict… In July and August 2009 these culminated in a series of aggressive newspaper articles, direct threats to certain staff members and group gatherings by the office gate. In some instance[s] the [project support unit] staff at Dhangadhi was requested to go home and the office had to be closed.879

6.9.1 A well-intentioned media event turned into parody

The rising aggression and incidents had mainly occurred in the town of Dhangadhi, Kailali District (the location of the project support unit), where Kailali-based interest groups in Dhangadhi mainly pressured the project support unit to increase the relative number of local staff from the Terai region. Also any other hiring process that the project initiated had commonly been accompanied with intense and rather aggressive lobbying by these groups. In reaction to this the project decided to organize a press conference aimed at “clarify[ing] to the local press and political parties in Dhangadhi what the [project] is working at.” In addition to invitees from all of the news media and political parties represented in Dhangadhi, the press conference was attended by the National Project Coordinator of the project, the National Project Coordinator from DoLIDAR (the responsible department of the implementing Nepalese Ministry for Local Development), two representatives from the Embassy of Finland, as well as the Local Development

Officer from Kailali District. Despite all good intentions, the press conference evolved into “what could best be described as [a] ‘chaotic’” situation:

PSU employee: …we held – when the situation in Dhangadhi got completely wild – this… “BOGs event,” where we attempted to present the BOGs to some journalists and some other hot-tempered dudes, which irritated them even more, ha-ha (chuckles, relaying a sense of irony)

…

Me: … Can you tell me a bit more about it…What exactly happened..?

PSU employee: Well yeah, there had been all kinds of bad publicity and stories in the local press [about the project]. Some had to do with recruitments or were focused on specific members of our staff. They were even pinpointed by their names in the papers! Then there were all kinds of [stories] about procurements… I don’t remember was it about pen drives or what, but something…like: “terrible corruption in [project] procurements!” But it was many kinds of strange – tearing up of the project in the papers. Like really aggressive stuff, and things that weren’t exactly – or one could say, once we then looked at the accusations word for word, that not one sentence had any truth in them. I mean, in Finland it [this type of inaccurate media coverage] would result in that kind of paper loosing its rights at once!

Me: Okay? (Chuckling, amused at her comparison to Finnish media rules).

PSU employee: Well, so we thought that – well we of course always reported to the Embassy about all these media hassles too… Well, in any case we thought that let’s have a … press conference and invite the whole local press and the ones who had been writing these mystery stories. And others. And let’s clarify to them all in everyone’s presence what it was all about. And go through all of their accusations. And what we are doing there. And why we are there in the first place.

Me: Mm?

PSU employee: We invited representatives of the government in Kathmandu to participate and [from] the Embassy Kari Leppänen and their GESI – specialist was there… there were three from the Embassy. And from DoLIDAR and maybe there was someone from the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Government too. Anyway, there were all these people present [and prepared] to answer. So if there were any further accusations, this would be a good time to ask questions. But we had structured the press

conference in the way that first … the GESI-specialist from the Embassy would present the BOGs – That we would start out with that. Well (slowly, stretching out the word) – ha-ha-ha (chuckles, seemingly amused with the wisdom of hindsight), [the GESI specialist] got maybe to the second point in the BOGs when this terrible shouting and commotion started up, and the press started to act up... It was precisely the one[s] who had been most actively writing these [aggressive] stories. You know: “We haven’t come here to listen to this! We have questions for you and what are you doing up there lecturing!?” and “bla bla bla!” And then they stood up and started to be just rampant out of control – ha-ha-ha (laughing) – and then the other side of the table were like: “hey sit down and let’s listen to what they have to say, that’s what we came for.” Well, then they started to yell at each other – and it started to get, like crazily loud, you know, that nobody was listening to anyone anymore, ha-ha (chuckles, as if underlining the point that the well-intentioned event had turned into a parody).

Me: (chuckle)

PSU employee: So that kind of press conference (seriously). I think when Kari Leppänen took the floor was the only moment when the room quieted down for a while to listen to what the Embassy had to say. (Chuckles again.)

Me: Well how did you… did you get it to calm down then, I mean from the crazy hassle? Did [the GESI-specialist] get to the end of the BOGs list?

PSU employee: No, she never got past the second point, ha-ha-ha (laughing again, seemingly at the irony of the whole story) – and then they started to scream about the pen drives and this, that and the other and then they just left in a frenzy, ha-ha (chuckles).

Me: Wow, so it ended in quite a chaos then?

PSU employee: Yeah, the more peaceful part of the press stayed – ha-ha-ha (laughing) – and the hot-tempered dudes left!

Me: Okay… so part of the people stayed then? At what point did Kari [Leppänen] take the floor then?

PSU employee: …if I remember correctly, it didn’t go quite to the end. We didn’t get to present all of what we had intended.881

881 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
6.9.2 Moral of the story: no more press conferences, always investigate the truth value of accusations, always ask for several offers for any procurements, and place future project headquarters and specialists closer to the operational areas

After hearing the story about the chaotic media event described above, I wanted to know if the project had analyzed the experience. *What were the lessons learned?*

Me: … [D]id you discuss later what happened [at the BOGs event] or what could have been done differently? … Did you analyze the lessons learned from that experience?

PSU employee: Probably just that – *after that we never arranged any press conferences again*, ha-ha-ha (laughs, jokingly). But … (seriously) one thing we learned from the SEAM project was that *when those kinds of accusations arise*, we set up a kind of research committee to *unravel the claims made*, one sentence at a time. What is said and does it have any truth-value … we also [meticulously] try to find out if there is actually anything behind the accusations. Because it’s of course also possible that there are people in our own staff who have tried to take short cuts and buy equipment from their uncle’s shop. It’s always possible. But then on the other hand the writing in Dhangadhi was such, that even without any kind of research you could immediately see that there was nothing to it. You could easily say that it’s not true – ha-ha (chuckles) – without any research commission.

Me: Right, okay. Yeah.

PSU employee: But what we *did* do afterwards was that we persistently, on a longer term, and even for the smallest procurements, decided to start asking for three offers… well then, *let’s collect offers for everything and do it with a flare…!* So we had the admin team swooshing up and down the Dhangadhi streets requesting so many offers that it became very clear to each and every merchant that we really do not buy our stuff from just any place. And we don’t have an interest in buying our goods from some certain uncle’s shop. Our admin team asked for so many offers [for every little item] that the market down right got fed up with us: “common,” enough already!” they were saying. (Chuckles with a sense of triumph.)

Me: Yeah? (Crack up laughing) ha-ha-ha-ha!

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882 SEAM is another bilateral Finnish – Nepali development cooperation project that was carried out at the same time in Eastern Nepal.

883 Emphasis added.
PSU employee: But that’s what the media wanted, wasn’t it? So let’s ask then. – Well, the writing in the papers ended at that.884

The presence of “others than the press” at the press conference had later triggered another attack from the same individuals who had expressed their dissatisfaction with the project in their prior newspaper writings and at the press conference described above. All of the events prior to and after the press conference held in September 2009, as well as other incidence reports from the staff being harassed were compiled into an internal project memo “for future reference.” An account of these happenings was also provided in the First Trimester Report of the last project year. Here “[c]onlicts, including this type of very localized ones,” were described as being essentially “about perceptions and the meanings that people attribute to events, institutions, and policies… [and] [i]n this case the focus appears to be solely [on] the Project Support Unit in Dhangadhi and the job and other opportunities for personal benefit therein.” All of the incidents described above were reported to have been time consuming for most of the project support unit staff, and the overall situation was said to have caused “serious stress especially for [the] individuals who were personally targeted and threatened.” In conclusion, the recommendation was that in the future the project support unit or headquarters and its specialists should be more effectively decentralized into the working districts where their work is more visible and tangible. “After all, the work is out in the districts, and this [is] not something that is evident for the certain segment of society in Dhangadhi.” Since the situation had remained calm in Dhangadhi at the end of the reporting period, a further conditional recommendation was made in the trimester report:

Should the events from July-September 2009 be repeated, an actor oriented analysis could be conducted involving a more detailed analysis of individual incentives and motivations, and systematic elaboration of all these with subsequent clear cut recommendations for the way forward.885

The threats and aggression experienced by the project were also discussed by the Steering Committee in its sixth meeting in September 2009. The Local Development Officer from Dadeldhura district attending the meeting had claimed that the transparency of the project had been brought to question in other districts as well, in addition to Kailali. His recommendation too, was to “clarify it to the

884 Interview PSU [57] 2014.
public which will increase the reliability of the project.” The National Project Coordinator, Mr. Das had accepted this as good advice, agreeing to the suggestion to focus on information dissemination. On the other hand he had raised the question as to what kind of additional information should the media be provided with, pointing out also that so far most of the information regarding project equipment, staff, NGOs, and expenditure related to the investment and the so-called Technical Assistance fund had already been available through the project report, which was a public document.886

6.10 Original plans remain valid without deviations – no particular focus on increasing understanding of conflict or project’s link to building peace

Despite the acute challenges to the project described above – rising from its operational context at the beginning of the final year of implementation – there were no signs of an identified need to change any of the plans for the remaining months of the project, nor for the envisaged second phase to be started back-to-back with this project. All of what was stated in the project documentation data of this phase, concerning the project’s link to peacebuilding and its approach of respecting Do No Harm principles and compliance to the Basic Operational Guidelines, was word-for-word repetition from earlier documentation887. The implementation was expected to be delayed in many districts due to “frequent band[has] and road blockages[;] caus[ing] significant trouble to user committees in procurement process, in availability of materials and in possible price hikes” – yet the annual work plan for the final year


887 Annual Workplan for Financial Year 4, (Project Support Unit, Dhangadhi, Nepal: Government of Nepal, Ministry of Local Development and Government of the Republic of Finland, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2009) 2; Personnel and Administration Manual (Dhangadhi: Project Support Unit, 2010) 8-9. In the workplan for the last financial year of the project as well as the in the Administrative Guidelines compiled during the project and largely in view of providing guidance for the second phase of the project, the claim was again made about the project taking into consideration the new political situation in Nepal and the context in which the project is being implemented, and further that it would link the peace with the development process in order to prevent future conflicts. Further, it was stated that the project would strive to ensure that it works in the interest of the peace process, respects Do No Harm principles and complies with the values and norms of the Basic Operational Guidelines.
of implementation was to “remain valid” without deviations.\textsuperscript{888} The Second Trimester Report also reiterated an earlier claim that the project’s activities relate to the root causes of conflict and hence support the peacebuilding process more broadly than “just” through focusing on water conflicts. Further, \textit{the report re-emphasized the “utmost importance to understand the past conflict processes and the period [of] transition that stems from this legacy, [as well as] the links between sustainable livelihoods, (post)conflict transition and peace building.”} \textsuperscript{889} 

In view of post-implementation activities, a so-called Post Construction Guideline -document was released also in this final phase of the project: “After successful… completion of the implementation phase activities and financial clearance of the scheme…Post Construction Phase will be started…”\textsuperscript{890} The key components of the post construction guidance concerned participatory monitoring and evaluation mechanisms on health behavior, and instructions for operation and maintenance of constructed schemes as well as water safety. Despite the earlier project documentation clearly calling for an approach going beyond focusing “just” on water conflict, this precisely was the only point included in all of the post construction guidance that in any way linked it to the earlier claims of the need to understand the past conflict and project’s link to peacebuilding: \textit{the capacity of water scheme users on the local level to handle water disputes and to negotiate other possible conflicts was mentioned in the guidance as one of the outcomes of post construction activities aimed at providing “water rights and conflict resolution skills training”}.\textsuperscript{891} Apart from this, none of the documents discussed here included, nor pointed to any further concrete guidance, tools or planned activities on how to establish the envisaged linkages between peace and development nor on how to operationalize the said principles and guidelines in the post-construction phase.

\textsuperscript{888} \textit{First Trimester Report, Financial Year 4} 32.
\textsuperscript{890} \textit{Post Construction Guidelines} (Dhangadhi, Nepal: Project Support Unit, 2009) 8.
\textsuperscript{891} Ibid.
6.11 External working environment influenced by “predictable unpredictability”

In preparing a basis for social and economic transformation in the country, the strategies of the Three Year Interim Plan (TYIP, July 2007 – June 2010) of the Government of Nepal included special efforts to end “all forms of discrimination” as well as the “promotion of multiculturalism and peace,” which were to ensure a foundation for inclusive development. With this as its backdrop, the Completion Report\(^{892}\) of the project drew together the accomplishments and experiences of the past four years of implementation, including the final part of annual reporting for its fourth financial year. Apart from this, the report functioned as what seemed to be a handover document in view of the planned second phase of the project.

At this juncture of closing the books of one project, and planning for the next, the reasoning given for the choice of the particular project area specifically as a politically unstable area was reinforced:

The political situation in the project districts was unstable and addressing the basic needs of [the] by then long neglected population of the [Far Western Region] and [Mid Western Region] was part of the conflict mitigation policy of the [Government of Nepal].\(^{893}\)

The external working environment of the project in the Mid and Far-Western regions was described in the inception report as having been influenced by a number of “predictably unpredictable” external factors not in project control, both human and natural.\(^{894}\) Overall, the instability of the context was explained as having had an effect on the project’s efficiency in planning and organization. The instability of the context was said to have contributed to the lack of available and qualified human resources on both district and village development committee levels, to high rotation of staff and lengthy absences of people in decision-making positions. All of this had amounted to delays in implementation, and thus weakened efficiency. The support organizations working with the project were also said to have experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining technically competent staff, leading to the need for the project to “patch up” missing capacity with staff employment. This in turn had led to a rise in costs for the project. Further, the strikes, bandhas, and roadblocks

\(^{892}\) Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report.
\(^{893}\) Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 10-11.
\(^{894}\) Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 52.
commonly witnessed throughout the duration of the project had resulted in some of the project areas becoming inaccessible, thereby also contributing to delays in implementation.

A more detailed description of external conditions affecting the project was provided in the completion report than had ever before been present in any of the earlier project documentation. Included in the report were accounts of a nationwide general strike; a clash between Armed Police Forces (AFP) and landless people of Kailali district affiliated with the United Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M); an “indefinite” bandh issued in Kailali; the forceful shut-down of government offices in Kailali; and a dispute between local staff in DDCs/municipalities/VDCs and the GON. In conclusion of the account of external conditions influencing the project, the completion report claimed that everyday life throughout most parts of the Mid- and Far-West had been significantly affected during the said reporting period by a number of other bandhas declared by different groups in various districts. Further, the report noted that clashes between different political and militant groups were increasing, a fact that had also been reported on by the UN. Operational space, the UN reporting claimed, had been negatively impacted, especially during the bandhas when vehicles had been hindered from moving in the project areas. All of these external conditions were thus reported as having slowed down the planned project work, and also as having affected reporting, as not all progress reports and related bills had reached the project support unit (PSU) by the end of the reporting period (March 13, 2010). As before, the completion report did not disclose any information of the process of data collection or the analysis of these external factors.

895 Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 53.
7 Completion

7.1 Risks identified at the start verified as valid at completion – peace and security defined key components of sustainable development

As explained earlier in this narrative of the case study project, a risks and assumptions assessment had been carried out during the inception stage of the project. The assessment had acknowledged the changes in the overall implementation context that had taken place during the three years interval between the formulation of the project and the beginning of its activities, but concluded that assumptions and risks had remained similar in nature and intensity. Based on the assessment, the overall implementation feasibility had been found to be realistic in the Inception Report. At the completion stage of the project, the assumptions and risks as envisaged in February 2007 at the beginning of the project were found not only as verifiable as having been valid concerns for the project, but also still largely relevant in July 2010, and also in view of the second phase being planned:

The political instability continues, there have been short term and long term strikes as well as road blockages on weekly and monthly basis, and debate of the future of ‘districts’ continues together with the broader debates related to the constitution and federalism. Water sector remains fragmented… The contributions from DDCs have been poor and unpredictable…

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In an account of the sustainability of the project and in view of recommendations for the future (Phase II of the project), the Completion Report discussed the project’s experiences against three thematic areas identified earlier in the course of the project as key dimensions of sustainable community development: social well-being of communities, including public health and safety; environmental integrity, including protection of natural resource values and functions; and

896 Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 59-60.
financial/economic viability of communities. In addition to these three dimensions of sustainability, peace and security was added as a fourth and completely new component in the completion report. No direct explanation was given in the report for this addition, but it was implicitly clear in the text that it was largely due to the incidents within the operational context during the last project year. Moreover, as a handover to the second phase of the project, this section on peace and security as a key dimension of sustainable development was clearly intended as a recommendation to be taken into consideration in planning:

Peace and security are prerequisites for achieving sustainable results [in community development]. Considering the Mid and Far Western context and the decade long internal conflict, a number of threats to sustainable development can be identified ranging from deep poverty and food insecurity (encouraging short term solutions) to low education, exposure and lost opportunities (resulting in aggressive attitudes, short term thinking and hopelessness). Therefore, …Phase II must follow up on various aspects of sustainability and continue work addressing the root causes of the conflict – many of these are still relevant.897

In view of planning for the second phase of the project, a lengthy list was presented in the Completion Report as topics “identified as subject to further analysis”. Included in the list was a comparative documentation of best practices from both the Lumbini project and the case study project; an impact study of the Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy; a sector analysis of regional water resources; an assessment of institutional development activities; a livelihoods analysis; and end use analysis and potentials for micro-hydro uses; an analysis of adaptation strategies to climate change; a technical study focusing on use of local techniques and materials; an analysis of rainwater harvesting for productive uses; and a sanitation and hygiene study. Despite the addition of peace and security earlier in the Completion Report as a key dimension to sustainable community development, there was no recommendation for conducting any kind of assessment or analysis concerning issues of conflict, tensions, security nor anything related to the building of peace.898

897 Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 61.
7.2 Responding to the post-conflict setting through promotion of human rights, democracy and good governance

Nepal’s fragile situation and history of conflict rose to the fore in the Completion Report again in a discussion of the project’s policy relevance and consistency with the policy on human rights, democracy and good governance. Here, Finland was said to strengthen democracy and the premises for development through an active human rights policy. The situation in Nepal was described as follows:

The human rights situation in Nepal bears the legacy of a decade of internal conflict. The culture of impunity characterizes the present situation. The issues listed in the following caption from the European Commission report (2002) are still relevant: “The root cause of the Nepal conflict is a complex web of interacting factors. These include uneven development within the country; endemic corruption; (...) ethnic and caste inequalities; intense politicization; human rights abuse; social exclusion and deprivation, and inadequate infrastructure development. (...)” All the working districts were seriously affected by the conflict with its unfortunate consequences for human rights and democracy, leaving a legacy that can be still felt today.

The way in which the project was described in the report as having responded to this post-conflict reality was through promoting decentralization together with democracy and good governance. The decision to work with user committees as the democratically elected representatives of the beneficiaries/users of the constructed schemes was explained as the approach adopted within the project for strengthening democratic institutions and civil society actors. Also, working through district-based projects was portrayed in the Completion Report as being about advocating good governance and developing local governments during times of transition, even when elected local bodies did not even exist. Further, the so-called Step-by-Step approach of the project was described as having been used to encourage transparent and democratic decision making, and to increase equal participation in the public decision making arena:

899 The consistency of the project was discussed also vis-à-vis the policies of poverty reduction, environmental sustainability and gender equality. Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 65-69.


901 Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 67.
It aimed at increasing people’s abilities to improve the quality of their own lives and to reduce poverty. In this context [the project] combated corruption through advocating transparency in all its activities both at the community and district levels, including transparency in both financial issues and in decision-making. Such as introducing public audit of the user committee funds is a noted example in Nepal and much appreciated by the people in the rural communities.\textsuperscript{902}

The project was described in the Completion Report as further having supported a rights-based approach to development policy by emphasizing the rights of both women and men of all ethnic and caste groups to participate in society and its development:

The participatory [Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy] … empowered the communities by encouraging also the women and deprived social groups to get involved and benefit from the project. Involvement of women and other disadvantaged groups in the democratically elected [User Committees] and training events, as well as using the [Water Use Master Plans] to ensure that there are no excluded communities within the working VDCs were amongst the mandatory conditions.\textsuperscript{903}

Finally, through its efforts to address poverty through water, health, institutional development, improving livelihoods and by offering equal opportunities to all, the project maintained that it had addressed human rights in the sense that extreme poverty constitutes one of the greatest human rights problems. Summing up, the Completion Report maintained that the project

...did strengthen the role and capacity of civil society, worked for the democratic institutions and responsible government, and through its district-based projects it also strengthened the competence of public sector across a number of sectors. Indirectly it also contributed to the capacity of human rights institutions by working with NGOs that also worked for human rights. By promoting and insisting on adherence to [the Gender and Social Inclusion] Strategy and the principles of good governance ...[the project] influenced the leaders on all levels to respect rights, rule democratically and govern effectively.

\textsuperscript{902} Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 67.
\textsuperscript{903} Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 67.
7.3 Lessons learned: emphasis on the importance of avoiding shortcuts, and sensitivity to project’s non-negotiable principles related to good governance, gender equality and social inclusion

The “overreaching lesson learned of the entire project” was defined in the Completion Report as being related to the project’s so-called Step-by-Step approach and other guidelines, including the Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy. The project had been carried out with a participatory approach, and it had been based on budgetary trust, transparency, accountability, inclusion and empowerment. The main tool for both financial transparency and overall accountability to the beneficiary communities and broader public were the public audits that had successfully been introduced as part of the project implementation. The recommendation was for the guidelines of the Step-by-Step process to constitute a

... constant subject of dialogue during the monitoring and supervision visits [in the communities] to remind and refresh the understanding of these steps by the various stakeholders, communities, [Support Organizations], staff and trainers alike. 904

Taking the defined steps one by one, “with time and attention” was seen as resulting in “more high quality schemes as well as capacitated [user committees], [support organizations] and other staff that gets training through this type of a learning-by-going process.” The staff’s awareness of and sensitivity to “the importance of certain non-negotiable principles such as those relating to [gender equality and social inclusion] and good governance (transparency, accountability, etc.)” was pointed to in the Completion Report as a key factor in the process. On the other hand, the low educational level of the beneficiary communities was noted as one of the bigger challenges of the chosen participatory approach to implementation:

In Mid and Far Western context this is not easy to do in practice due to very low educational level in the remote and poor villages and the fact that many [project]-supported villages have not done anything even vaguely similar ever before. 905

905 Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 70.
7.3.1 Lessons of the gender equality and social inclusion approach

Four more lessons learned for the project were described in the Completion Report, as related specifically to the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion—approach of the project. The first of these was that the principles of the approach are non-negotiable and thus constitute the need to be followed up, insisted on and enforced systematically throughout the various steps of the project design relating to monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The completion report maintained that on the level of individual schemes, participatory monitoring of gender equality and social inclusion indicators should ensure that these issues remain actively and systematically on the agenda.

The second lesson regarding the gender equality and social inclusion approach of the project was that the changes sought through it are often subtle and difficult to record. Despite anecdotal evidence documented by various monitoring teams describing positive change in particular with regard to women’s participation, the Completion Report maintained that it was still early to identify systematic impact of the so-called GESI approach. It was thus suggested that further studies and evidence gathering be conducted to identify successes and failures as well as “emerging new bottlenecks for change.”

The third lesson in this regard was that even with quotas and continuous calls for the need for gender and socially balanced representation in the project, there had still been fewer women and members of disadvantaged groups present in project meetings and as active members in Water User Committees. The same was stated as applying to district-level events and Support Organization staff. My own observations during the visit to the project in Achham district support this. Not only did I observe that there were fewer females involved as actors in the project’s activities in Bhatakatiya (for instance only one member of the support organization PRSDC’s staff was female), but also that the women attending a water users main committee meeting seemed to have a less prominent role. They spoke less and were seated further back in the meeting venue:

[Field Notes]

Most of the discussion in this meeting goes on in the front of the room, amongst the men.

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906 Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 72-73.
The women are mainly just whispering to one another. Seems that they also have opinions, but don’t get (or dare to take?) voice in this setting.

00:45:.. Over ¾ of an hour into the meeting and not a single woman has spoken or taken the floor to comment, take a stand or anything!?

00:49:.. Discussion still takes place mainly in the front of the room. Field Coordinator speaks to the men. He doesn’t even look to the back of the room where the women are sitting.

00:51:..

Someone throws a question up in the air?

00:52:16 Laughter, clapping. End of the first part of the meeting.

Figure 19. Seating of main committee meeting in Bhatakatiya, 21.3. 2008

I find myself wondering why all of these people are just sitting here. Is the point not to make decisions together? Or is this a place where information is simply shared? HOW IS THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONING OF THE

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908 Picture of research journal 21.3.2008.
MC DEFINED IN THE PROGRAM? WHERE IS IT DECIDED? IS IT SPELLED OUT SOMEWHERE?

- “Participatory and inclusive approach” - isn’t quite reality. At least it is not visible in this meeting. This is more a case of “speaking at” [SO employee talking in monologue to locals] than real dialogue!

- The Field Coordinator is de facto leading the meeting, while the nominated Chairman seems to be more of a ‘puppet.’ He just sits at the Chairman’s desk.

- What about time management? Participants just sit and listen. After 3 hours tea is served.

- People come and go; approximately half of the people go outside of the room (as we do with the interpreter) to drink their tea. In the meantime, the meeting goes on and on, and on.

During the tea break, I engaged in a discussion with female members of the main committee. They told me that this meeting was a typical one, and that they were content with how things went during the meeting. They told me that there haven’t been any development projects in Bhatakatiya, so this is the best so far: it is broad in scope. “We are illiterate – we only know how to write our names through the Lutheran’s literacy program [from before the conflict]. Now we are members of a committee and we are excited about participating. We can now easily talk to people and express our views!” the women told me.909

The Completion Report noted a correlation between the size and complexity of the scheme with gender imbalance in the user committees:

It is also evident that the more large and complex the scheme is (i.e. the more money is involved), the more likely it is that the [User Committee] members are all male.910

Moreover, the project found there to be a lack of clarity concerning the roles and responsibilities of the various actors involved in scheme implementation. Women and members of disadvantaged groups in particular had often been nominated as members in the User Committees, “but nothing more.” The conclusion in this regard was that as “the change will not come from within” – strong enforcement

910 Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 72-73.
from monitoring and supervision teams would be needed to produce gender equality. One of my research participants spoke at length and with emotion on these points too:

PSU employee: Of course you know, the modality is very nice: the funds…go directly to the community. But in reality only a few members of the community were… handling all these financial issues. Most of the women, Dalits, the marginalized groups, you know, they don’t know about transparency. How much the community got from the project, how much from the VDC, how much from the DDC. Actually, they don’t – still if we compare to five years [ago] and now, of course things have been changed. But still this part…it still needs to improve. … when we went to Humla… I asked the women, the Dalits, the marginalized groups…only few, two or three people are very much involved in the procurement of the materials… nearly all people, they don’t know about the funding. How much they got in the village.

Me: Why is that?

PSU employee: Actually, I think it was, you know they have the right to know about the funds; how much funds are in the project. Of course people are, very much interested – especially user committee Chairperson, user committee Treasurer, they are not so much interested to just communicate…to transfer this knowledge to other people.

Me: Yeah? You felt that they were not interested in sharing the information?

PSU employee: Yes.

Me: But why? Why?

PSU employee: What I have found during my monitoring visits…When the users committee will be formed, so the Chairperson or Treasurer – they are …the key persons who are to handle all these financial issues. Especially, who will share the signing, who will sign in the chair – and [in] most of the UCs, women are [nominated as] the Treasurers. Women…[are nominated as] the key persons in the UC, like the vice-Chairperson [is a] woman, and the Treasurers are women… But the …Treasurer, she doesn’t know how much…the project has already lifted the money! She doesn’t know, hasn’t heard. Only the Chairperson or the Secretary [know] – because they are the male. They are very clever guys, you know! So even during procurement, the women are not involved.

Me: It sounds like the Treasurer, who is supposed to be on top of the funds and all of the information, that she is just appointed to that position because
she’s a woman? Because they need to have a woman in that position [to fill the quotas]?

PSU employee: Yes!

Me: And as a matter of fact she doesn’t have a clue?

PSU employee: No, no, no. Actually you know, I think that – of course if you see [it] on paper, the documentation – okay, the key person[s]: women are in these positions. As vice-Chairs or Treasurers. But in reality, I think she is not in that position like in the decision-making process. Most of the cases are handled by the clever – the guys, the males.

Me: Yeah, yeah?

PSU employee: So I raised this…when I visited Humla – and the women [were] so complaining … “the chairperson, you know, they are very clever, they don’t inform [us]” I mean: “we women can also go to the market and buy the material; why then?” they tell, “why they are not informing us?” You know? They are complaining so much! So I just wrote [it] in the report also. I don’t know, [the project management] may be angry, ha-ha (laughs hesitantly), I don’t know (chuckles again).

Me: No, but I think you did the right thing!

PSU employee: but it is not my [opinion], I just tell what they say.

Me: Yes, of course! - But what about …– it’s interesting that despite the fact that you are a man that they [the women] were daring enough to tell you this. That they were complaining to you so openly? … I don’t know, do you see that as a problem?

PSU employee: Actually…I just discussed [with women] individually. I usually… have a separate meeting with Dalits and separate meeting with single [individual] women also…because… you know, women, they cannot raise their voice in a big mass meeting, you know? They don’t like to complain about the leaders of the village. Because they are the people who are leading since – many years… So I tried to figure out [in this way]…what is the reality. So I put this issue in the user committee meeting, even in the mass meeting, and also in the separate meeting with [individual] women… and Dalit: what they feel especially about the transparency.

Me: Mm?

PSU employee: …if we compare [the situation to what it was] five years [ago], it is slowly improving. But it is still a lot of work to be done…
most of the women [in these positions]... are not educated, but they read and write... but usually... in our context, I think most of the male, you know, they are out from the home, so who will handle the finances at home? If we give the responsibility to the women they will definitely – of course in the beginning it is a little bit difficult, ... so that’s why NGO[s are] there to support... all these issues... they should [give] support to the women treasurers, you know? To handle all issues. But definitely women – they can do!

I think a lot of – it’s usually the procurement... there is competition [about] who will go for procurement. That is very, very crucial part, what I found, you know?

Me: Mm?

PSU employee: Because in the procurement...there is some, you know, hanky-panky business (chuckles) – so that’s [what] everybody wants in the village...political people, or any people who would like to go to the bazar to buy the materials. There is some commissions, some hanky-panky business – So that’s – you know, that is the main thing. So that’s why the chairperson, or maybe key person, they don’t want to share all these issues to the people.

Me: okay – yeah.

Finally, the fourth lesson learned in terms of the gender equality and social inclusion approach was that social discrimination is “very sensitive and more difficult to address than gender-based discrimination.” In addition to the social and cultural dimensions of social inclusion/exclusion, it was explained in the Completion Report as appearing “…to have very strong political, religious and economic connotations.” Ensuring women’s participation and voice in the project had been found “easier” than those of disadvantaged caste groups. Therefore the report contended that social inclusion was yet to be seriously addressed in its own right: “many tools can be shared [with gender equality approaches] but something has to be added to address the political and religious dimension.”

[The project’s gender and social inclusion] strategy and related tools & indicators have a lot of potential but need[ ] to be improved now that there are real life, first hand experiences on what works and what does not, considering the highly challenging socio-cultural environment in Mid and far Western Nepal.912

911 Emphasis added.
912 Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 73.
7.3.2 Poverty ranking found to cause social conflict

One of the lessons linked to social conflict, and identified in the Completion Report, was that concerning the poverty ranking process of the sanitation, health and hygiene component of the project. Despite the good intentions of the project design in this regard, the manipulation of subsidies and poverty ranking results had been found to be “too easy:”

Poverty has many faces, and it changes in time, seasonally and over the years and therefore, it is not possible to fix 'one-fit-for-all' poverty indicators and systems for measuring it. Therefore, participatory poverty (well-being) ranking was established to elaborate poverty within a community by the community. This practice had worked well [in] earlier [projects] but now must be subject to honest self-assessment by all those involved with the practice, including the community itself, its local elites, [Support Organizations] and the project staff alike... [From the project’s perspective] this process appears to be manipulated by [Support Organizations] and/or local elites...resulting in [an outcome of] 100 % ultra- poor communities even where all other indicators do not support this outcome, and hence not serving its purpose in directing the support to where it is most critically needed: to those who truly are the poorest of the poor. Sometimes instead of being a tool for equitable subsidy distribution the process has caused social conflicts.\textsuperscript{913}

Despite the widespread problems related to poverty ranking pinpointed as one of the bigger lessons of the project, there was no deeper analysis or closer explanation in the project documentation of what and how things went wrong in the use of the ranking practice. Apart from the call to subject the practice to “honest self-assessment by all those involved,” the Completion Report did not make any suggestions about how the process of ranking the poverty status of beneficiary communities should be changed in order to avoid causing social conflicts. One of the former PSU employees I spoke to after the ending of the project explained to me, however, that in the system of offering subsidies to the poorest during construction had been omitted completely in the second phase of the project and changed into some kind of ex post reward system.\textsuperscript{914}

\textsuperscript{913} Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report.
\textsuperscript{914} Interview PSU [57] 2014.
7.4 Link between development and peace omitted from recommendations for future assistance

The recommendation of the Completion Report on further assistance to Nepal was to keep focus on rural areas, including “the forgotten small towns such as district head quarters in remote districts”, and to “ground … analytical policy level work systematically into community level realities and real life action.” The three thematic areas recommended for future assistance were small rural towns' environmental support; climate change adaptation and mitigation in rural areas and small towns; and food security and sustainable livelihoods.\footnote{Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 64-65.} Despite an assessment of the security situation as remaining “unpredictable” in the Mid and Far Western regions at the end of the project,\footnote{Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 71.} the Completion Report did not include any recommendations pertaining to the idea of linking development work to the past conflict nor the need for continued peacebuilding — both points that had been mentioned several times earlier in the course of the project.\footnote{Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 64-65.} In terms of the unpredictable security situation, in a discussion of financial management at district and community levels, the Completion Report merely noted that

…funds may become subject to abuse both within the community (such as [User Committee] Chairperson who decides to collect the cash and disappear) or by external bandits. [Therefore] [i]t was recommended that some “Cash Carrying Insurance” should be introduced when large sums of cash have to be taken into remote places for …training events and campaigns, and that [User Committees] should be encouraged to pay construction materials to the suppliers through A/C payee cheque or bank draft instead of cash.\footnote{Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report, 72.}

Disaster preparedness and management had not been included in the design of the project, but was strongly recommended as a “serious issue to be included in Phase II.” According to the Completion Report, the project had in limited scale taken part in coordinated emergency actions, but all measures to prevent and mitigate disasters were described as having been emergency responses only. Thus prevention and preparedness work were portrayed as challenges of the future. The main disaster risks in the region, as identified in the Completion Report, were problems related
to diarrhea epidemics, floods, landslides and earthquakes. *No mention was made in the recommendations concerning disaster management and preparedness concerning so-called man-made disasters or risks related to political instability.*\(^{919}\)

\(^{919}\) *Completion Report, Phase I: Main Report*, 84.
The empirical findings of this research, presented as a chronological narrative of the Rural Village Water Resources Management Project in the preceding three chapters are coupled in this chapter with the main features of the theoretical and conceptual framework presented in chapter two, and as presented in the matrix below (figure 3 as introduced in chapter two).

This makes for a discussion of the results of this study, leading to some conclusions as to the contribution it makes first and foremost to the academic discussion on aid in conflict, and secondarily to the study of Finnish foreign, security and development policy. In this chapter I will also discuss the possible implications of this study for practitioners (people and organizations) in the business of planning, implementing, evaluating, and funding such activities in the spheres of policy and practice. Further, I will briefly revisit the research design, and finally, make some preliminary suggestions for further research.
This in-depth single case study took on the task of exploring the practice of a development intervention carried out in a conflict-affected context. The main research question guiding the narrative analysis of the empirical data asked how it was that the conflict-affected context was considered within the framework of the case study project, and what (f)actors contributed to or inhibited this? As I have explained above, this general research question not only took an interest in the repercussions of the conflict and its aftermath on the design and implementation of the case study project, but it also looked into the ways in which the project pro-actively and/or reactively took into consideration and responded to the various challenges of political instability, conflict background and tensions rising from the context along the way.

The empirical narrative showed that the studied project was affected by its conflict-affected context in several ways throughout its duration, and points to repeated claims within the project documentation as to the intervention’s contribution to peacebuilding. Yet the narrative demonstrated these claims to be largely void of substantial content and lacking of a theory of change or monitoring and evaluation system to back them up. The project’s responses to contextual challenges were further disclosed in the narrative as having been predominantly reactive and ad hoc as opposed to pro-active and planned. Reasons for this included thin contextual knowing and lack of local analyses, uneven and weak understanding and know-how of peace and conflict sensitivity among project actors; as well as the vague and inconclusive policy and program guidance regarding aid in conflict-affected contexts. Moreover, the notion of conflict sensitivity and the proclaimed interlinking of development with peace was merely a voluntary feature in the program paper trail instead of being a mandatory crosscutting theme affecting the design and implementation of the intervention. Further, despite a strong emphasis in the intervention on risk management, the narrative presented the project as lacking in systematic and localized context and conflict analyses or risk assessments. The conflict-affected context was taken into consideration mainly in the beginning of the project and the perspective was restricted to the national level political situation.

On the other hand the story told how transparency in all project work; emphasis on project actors’ local knowledge and contacts with local staff and beneficiaries, including clarity in communication; as well as adopting a participatory approach were used proactively as ways to respond to the risks perceived. The narrative also revealed how the project was able to take into consideration structural injustices, underlying sources of grievance and root causes of conflict.
through its step-wise program design based on strong local ownership and inclusive working modalities. In this sense the story found the programmatic approach of the intervention as having been intuitively sensitive to conflict as well as to have demonstrated its capacity and potential to also work on conflict.

Through the narrative analysis of the data compiled for this research, I found more fluctuation between the presence and absence of proactive considerations of and reactions to contextual instabilities and tensions than I had expected. As I briefly mentioned in the methodology chapter as part of the discussion of narrative analysis, I started this research process with the idea of a certain kind of curve along the timeline of the project as to how I presumed contextual challenges to have emerged and to have been considered in the framework of the intervention. From the outset, my question was not so much whether contextual instabilities and the conflict background of Nepal would be present in the intervention, but rather how and in what kinds of circumstances it would emerge. Based on a preliminary inspection of the early project documentation and archival material concerning the case intervention, I expected the conflict background of Nepal to be strongly present in the rest of the dataset. During my visit to the project in the spring of 2008, some 18 months after it’s beginning, I was surprised to find that the conflict background of the operational context did not seem to be in any particular focus in the working of the intervention. I found contextual instabilities and tensions to re-emerge more strongly in both the project documentation as well as in the interview data again toward the end of the project. Based on this, I expected my imaginary curve on the project’s timeline to look something reminiscent to that drawn in figure 20 below:\footnote{This diagram is not based on actual values set for specific variables, but rather is meant only to display the anticipated presence of situations or information about contextual instability or tensions in the studied project.}
In the final denouement, after having analyzed the entire dataset, I ended up with a similar, but more nuanced picture of the curve (see figure 21 below). One in which there was more movement between presence and absence of considerations regarding contextual instabilities and tension than I had expected at the outset:

**Figure 20.** Expected curve on project timeline regarding presence of contextual instabilities and tensions in dataset

**Figure 21.** Curve of the final denouement: more movement between presence and absence of contextual tensions on project timeline than expected
In addition to the general research question discussed above, four more specific questions were formulated for the study based on the theoretical and conceptual framework presented in chapter two. These questions asked 1) whether the studied intervention represents a case of working in, on or around conflict; 2) whether there were signs of peace and conflict sensitivity in the project (and what kind); 3) in what ways risk management thinking was present in the project; and finally 4) what the project looks like in reflection with the principles of intervention as defined in the framework for intervention ethics by Ramsbotham et al. as impartiality, mutuality, sustainability, complementarity, reflexivity, consistency, accountability, and universality. It is through answering these questions that I aim in the following to be able to provide an in-depth perspective of the studied project as a case of development intervention in a conflict-affected context.

In brief, the answer to the first two of these questions is a “yes.” I argue that the studied intervention may be seen as having worked around, and in conflict despite the conflict; and that through its master planning process and gender and social inclusion strategy it may also be seen as having worked on conflict. I further make the claim that the studied project was semisensitive to peace and conflict, and worked intuitively in conflict through a number of ways that largely derived from prior Finnish experience of working in the Lumbini project during the time of the civil war.

The concise answer to the question concerning risk management thinking is “prominently, but including contradictions.” I had not anticipated the prominence of risk management thinking at the outset of the study, and in fact felt compelled to take it into the set of questions (and theoretical framework) after realizing how prevalent it was in the dataset. I make the claim here, however, that there was a disconnection between the prominence of risk management thinking and the analysis and actions taken to manage risks. Finally, with regard to the question about intervention ethics, I present how elements of all principles except for those concerning reflexivity and accountability were clearly present in the intervention, with a particular emphasis on the principles of impartiality, mutuality and consistency. I will provide a closer discussion of each of these answers in the following.\textsuperscript{921}

\textsuperscript{921} The quotes used in the following sections of this chapter are examples from the narrative presented in chapters 5-7, and are therefore not referenced anew. The same applies also to all of the sections of this chapter referring to the discussion presented in the theoretical and conceptual framework. In other words, no new sources that have not already been cited elsewhere in this dissertation have been referred to here. Instead, this chapter brings together the theoretical and
The development intervention studied as a case for this research can be described as having included elements of all three approaches to conflict for development actors, as defined by Jonathan Goodhand and described in chapter two. The three approaches, working in, on and around conflict, were obvious in the project in varying intensity at different stages of the project. Signs of the three different approaches also varied among the project’s different stakeholders as well as between various elements of the dataset.

The fact that a development intervention was being planned for an area in the midst of an open violent conflict in Nepal in the early 2000s, could at first glance be understood as a sign of working in conflict. Rather than fulfilling the characteristics of Goodhand’s working in conflict approach (as aid actors acknowledging conflict and having some awareness of development influencing conflict as well as the need to be sensitive to conflict and adapt policies and programs accordingly), the early approach could instead be described as **working in conflict despite the conflict.** While the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) emphasized the root causes of conflict as the basis of Finnish-Nepali conceptual discussion of chapter two with the narrative analysis. For this reason the sources have not been referenced as meticulously as in chapter two.
development cooperation, no explicit documented action was taken to analyze and come to a deeper understanding of the said root causes, underlying tensions, ongoing instabilities and open violent conflict in the intended operational context. Furthermore, there was no sign of modifying the planned project to be sensitive to the conflict in the way suggested by peace and conflict sensitive approaches to development. A security mission was commissioned by the MFA during the early planning phase with the aim of determining whether or not it would be possible to implement the project according to original plans. The mission concluded that the intended operational context was characterized by great uncertainties, but resolved that it “seemed right” to launch the project. The justification for this was found in the history of other ongoing development projects in the country regardless of the conflict: it has been done before, so why not again? The legacy of the Finnish funded water project in the Lumbini area was the key example in this regard. Further, as the security mission did not expect the unstable security situation to improve in the foreseeable future, it did not see any point in waiting for it to do so. These sentiments voiced in the security mission’s report were shared by the MFA: any move toward a successful peace agreement was not seen as a realistic turn of events in the foreseeable future. The Ministry did thus not see any reason to postpone the beginning of the project any further. This mode of action on part of the MFA may be seen as a foundational impediment in terms of the project’s possibilities to truly work in conflict, as indicated by Goodhand, including a sensitivity to past and present conflict dynamics.

The influence of the international policy debate at the time of decision-making to either withdraw or proceed with the intervention was also significant and can be understood as having created a push toward a working in conflict mode of action in the project. The OECD/DAC debate on conflict prevention was topical at the time of the project’s design phase, and the notion of conflict sensitivity was rising. Moreover, the international aid community’s contiguous stance to strive to continue with development cooperation in Nepal despite the conflict was another important factor in the background to the Finnish government’s decision to proceed with project preparations. As one research participant from the MFA put it: “it doesn’t actually help a whole lot if you just leave…we should try to find…ways of working with which to produce…basic services…Despite the conflict.” The water sector was seen as suitable in this regard, as water and sanitation were seen to be “fairly neutral…issues, which all parties need any way.” As opposed to being a question of neutrality, my analysis is that this thinking may instead be understood as water being implicitly seen by this research participant as a connector (in the sense
defined by Mary Anderson and described in chapter two) through which to build cohesion within divided communities.

The approach of working in conflict despite the conflict was discernible also on the local level of inquiry of this study. There was no guidance in any of the project’s documentation related to acquiring information or deeper understanding of the conflict-affected and politically unstable operational context, constituting another inhibiting factor in the way of the project being able to act in a fully conflict sensitive way. In Bhatakatiya the context had been surveyed from a conflict perspective only with regard to disputes concerning water resources. If not completely oblivious to conflict, disregarding the broader conflict background of the operational context in this manner was in contrast to recommendations of peace and conflict sensitivity frameworks that call for looking to conflict histories, dynamics and parties on the level of the intervention activity. In this sense the project may be seen as having been seemingly conflict ignorant.

**Working around conflict** as an approach in the studied intervention was also conspicuous in its early design phase. Goodhand calls this a “conflict blind” approach where aid actors try to avoid the issue of conflict or treat it mainly as a constraint to development, and a negative externality. A sign of this approach was the fact that political instability and contextual turmoil were distinctly portrayed as something to avoid altogether in the intervention’s early planning documentation from 2002. The intended operational area was portrayed as being less unstable than the rest of the country, and therefore suitable for the planned intervention. Overall, the attitude relayed in data from Embassy and MFA documents toward working in a politically unstable conflict context may be described as cautious. Although the Embassy spoke strongly in favor of starting up the project despite contextual instabilities, there seemed often to be a disclaimer or option included for use of an ‘emergency break’ with regard to the “difficult situation in Nepal” and “the development of the political situation in the country.” Yet the Embassy’s recommendation was to continue with planning for the intervention, so that if the Maoist movement and the government in the country would agree on a ceasefire and achieve a peace agreement, the interventions with plans ready could start implementing them without delay. In other words, there was a hesitance in starting the project during the ongoing open violent conflict, but development work was portrayed as having the possibility to resume once the situation calmed down. A further example of thinking along the lines of the working around conflict approach was the recommendation of the security mission conducted in 2004, prior to the project’s beginning, to avoid altogether areas where Maoists had been found to collect various types of contributions and local taxes.
Just as the decision had been made to proceed with project preparations despite the ongoing conflict, working in conflict despite the conflict, as explained above, the royal coup of February 2005 froze the project down, presenting yet another example of the working around conflict approach. Country consultations between Finland and Nepal were cancelled and the project was set on standby. A formal decision was made at this juncture for all further preparations for the project to be discontinued until the security situation in the intended project area “would enable positive operational conditions for project implementation.” The MFA decided to continue a strict human rights policy towards Nepal in this situation and Finnish support to political parties aiming to restore democracy in the country was seen as something to be continued. In terms of new development cooperation contracts, the case intervention included, the decision was made not to start anything new until the “prerequisites for continued cooperation” related to improvements in democracy and governance existed. A case in point confirming the working around conflict approach was the decision in the spring of 2006 to restart the frozen projects as a follow-up of the positive shifts in the political situation in Nepal: since the situation had calmed down, development aid could be started up again.

As explained by Paffenholz\textsuperscript{922}, conditionality refers to laying down certain conditions under which aid will be provided. Goodhand does not include conditionality as part of his discussion of working in, on or around conflict, but it should nevertheless be noted here that during the early design phase of the project one of the ways Finland as a donor may be seen as having justified its decisions leading to working around conflict was through \textit{(peace) conditionality} thinking. An example of this was when the project preparations were on hold due to the ongoing conflict and development cooperation was portrayed as one of the methods with which Finland, together with the international community aimed to assert pressure on the King and the administration in Nepal to end the conflict. During bilateral country consultations in 2003 the Finnish delegation had insinuated that Nepal did not meet the criteria and prerequisites set for long-term partner countries, and that the situation in Nepal would therefore be closely monitored. It was explained in the minutes of the country consultations that Finland would pay particular attention to the Nepalese government’s commitment to democratic principles, improving the human rights situation and effective implementation of reforms promoting good governance and abolishment of corruption. Also the Finnish Embassy in Kathmandu had pointed in a statement of

\textsuperscript{922} Paffenholz 2005.
the country’s situation to Nepal’s ability to “secure peace” as a prerequisite for starting up development activities. As was later found through a fact-finding mission of the MFA, however, the strategy of conditionality was proven to have been unsuccessful and had had very little if any weight at all in terms of its effect on the peace agreement. Nevertheless, conditionality seemed to prevail in the MFA’s thinking even after the project had been started up, as was voiced in a project proposal concerning the project’s funding: Starting up the project and allocating 4 million euros of missing funds to it was portrayed as being an “affirmative signal to the government of Nepal” for the positive developments in the recent past with regard to the conflict.

One of the features of the working around conflict approach, as described by Goodhand, is a tendency to adopt a one size fits all approach to reform processes without consideration of a country’s specific vulnerability to conflict. In this sense, the working around conflict approach lived on even after the project had been given go-ahead by the MFA and had been kicked off together with the Nepalese government. A sign of this was presented in the planning work and project design that was continued largely according to normal development cooperation procedures, without any particular focus or attention to the unstable context in which a peace agreement had barely been reached. This happened despite recommendations by the MFA, Embassy staff and the special security mission conducted prior to starting up the project to “inject special considerations” into the overall planning framework due to the conflict context.

An example of how the thinking in the studied intervention shifted elusive between a working around conflict approach and one of working in conflict despite the conflict presented itself in the shift of argumentation concerning the chosen operational area. Political instability was identified in two separate versions of the project’s main guiding document as an issue to be taken into consideration by the intervention. This political instability was, however, used in two completely opposite ways to justify selection of the project area in the two document versions. In the Outline version of the project document in 2002, as mentioned above, political instability was portrayed as something to avoid, whereas two years later it was given as a main reason to select that particular area. No explanation for this change in argumentation was provided in the data, but I did find that the two different document versions had been produced and finalized by two different consultancies, which may have been one reason for the rupture between the two narratives. In addition to the consultants writing the reports possibly having an effect on the way in which the contextual instability was handled in the project
document, the decisions of other international aid actors (Helvetas, ADB and WB) to continue with their interventions despite instabilities was probably also an important factor in the shift from the approach of working around conflict to one of working in conflict, despite the conflict. This may also be seen as a sign of the project’s implicit leaning toward the principle of universality, as suggested in the framework of intervention ethics defined by Ramsbotham et al.

Finally, I found the decision to launch the project despite continuing instabilities to be a sign of willingness on part of certain key actors within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the implementing agency Finnish Consulting Group (FCG) to take a conscious risk of carrying out a project in a conflict-affected context. Therefore, it was perhaps not surprising that the theme of risk management became a central underlying current in the design and implementation of the project.

8.2 Primacy of ‘one-way street’ risk management

I found risk management to be a prominent theme in the studied case project throughout its duration. Instead of what Duffield has described as the phenomenon of the fortified aid compound, where aid actors behave in an increasingly isolationist manner and are protected by strict safety protocol and
security infrastructure, the risk management thinking in this case study project was more closely related to what I have described above concerning the approach of working around conflict. Conflict and contextual instabilities and tensions in general were typically portrayed as a negative externality for the development intervention, something to be avoided as far as possible. Overall, the consideration of all identified potential risks within the framework of the project could be described as ‘one-way street’ risk management thinking. In other words the risks identified were predominantly from the context toward the project with little or no consideration of how the intervention might present a risk toward the context.

During the design phase there were fears within the project concerning security risks and the project being called into question by Maoists. The risks perceived in this regard were related to staff security in the operational context. Local/Nepali staff was suspected to be the most likely target of Maoist pressure and blackmail. Further, there were concerns related to “political instabilities” causing “delays and other problems” for the project. It was further suspected from the outset that the lack of elected administrative bodies in the project context, as well as the overall weak local administrative capacities would cause challenges to project implementation. Also the possibility of project funds being diverted into the hands of others than those intended in the project design was seen as probable. In the worst case these contextual challenges and risks were seen as giving grounds to abandoning the entire project in the middle of implementation, and resulting in considerable financial losses.

There was no evidence in the studied dataset of rigorous and comprehensive localized risk and impact assessments having been regularly conducted as part of the project. Instead, risks seemed to have initially been identified and assessed based primarily on experiences of working with a similar infrastructure project during the conflict in the Lumbini area in the late 1990s, and general knowledge of the national level Nepali political situation followed by the Embassy in Kathmandu and through the project’s affiliation with the international aid community in Nepal. An exception to this was an “in-depth assessment” of risks and assumptions carried out as part of the inception reporting, six months into the project. Each year of the intervention the project support unit reported that it had re-assessed the initially identified risks, and the risks were repeatedly assessed as remaining “similar in nature and intensity” to what they had been at the beginning of the project. The perspective of these assessments of contextual risks in the operational area of the project was on the national political level, and as such did not provide for a localized perspective of risks in the various project districts.
One of the solutions to managing the foreseen risks was to start the project on a limited scale, so as to not loose too much on the investment, should the political instabilities indeed intensify and compel the project to pull out. The project actors’ local knowledge and contacts with local staff and beneficiaries was also considered key in managing risks: locals were counted on for warning foreign staff “when it is not safe to visit.” A further risk management solution was clarity in communicating the aims of the project to all stakeholders. The Maoists were singled out here as a specific group toward whom “the rules of the game” should be made clear. As would be seen later, however, it was not just the Maoists that were parties in the societal transformation and subsequent push and pull of diverging interests vis-à-vis the project. This took some of the project’s actors quite by surprise, and revealed the somewhat thin understanding of the country’s conflict dynamics and process of transformation. Transparency in all project work was emphasized in the dataset as a key to the project’s overall success but also specifically in terms of providing a means to manage risks. This is in line with Anderson’s recommendation for transparency and openness in all intervention related work in order to ensure safety, and may also be seen as a sign of the project’s holding to the principle of accountability, as discussed by Ramsbotham et al. Likewise, the participatory approach of the project can be seen as having contributed not only to the principle of sustainability as discussed by Ramsbotham et al., but was also portrayed in the data as minimizing the risk of political interference and water resource disputes within the framework of the project. The pro-active approach to solving local conflicts mandated by the Water Use Master Planning (WUMP) process can also be seen predominantly as risk management (despite being defined in the dataset as being a sign of the project’s contribution to building peace): the rationale behind creating systems of conflict resolution as part of the WUMP process was explained against the backdrop of source disputes and social conflicts having jeopardized several good projects when problems had been addressed too late or not at all.

Some of the identified risks did in fact materialize during the course of the project. Tensions intensified in particular toward the end of the intervention. The project experienced intense pressure and badmouthing from local pressure groups and media representatives related to recruitment decisions and procurements. There were cases of blackmail and threatening of staff members, and the operational area in general saw an increase in the number of strikes (bandhas) and other tensions, many of which had direct effects on project implementation. Despite a strong orientation toward seeing contextual instabilities as a threat to the project, and the many plans for managing the foreseen risks, project actors seemed to have been
caught somewhat by surprise by this turn of events. Incidents related to staff members and project venues being threatened led to a tightening of security protocol, vaguely reminiscent of what Duffield alludes to as the fortified aid compound\footnote{Duffield 2012.}: No longer were office gates and doors kept open for free access. Also a system of incident reporting was set up at this juncture. The use of the system was, however, voluntary, and did not include a process for gathering and analyzing the lessons learned from the incidents or the ways in which they were handled.

Other solutions to the materialized risks were the decision to always and consistently reply to all inquiries and pressure letters as well as the more active and conscious use of the Basic Operational Guideline (BOG) document as a protection against unjustified demands and accusations toward the project. By formally acknowledging all requests and demands asserted by various individuals and pressure groups the project can be seen as having attempted to act reflexively by seriously taking into consideration its relationship with all representatives of the beneficiary communities and making the effort to explain to all interested persons the aims and interests of the project.

The unwritten rule adopted by the project of consistently referring to the BOG document in response to any pressures, threats, blackmailing etc. may be understood as the project’s strong commitment to the principle of universality, as defined by Ramsbotham et al. The underlying idea in this principle is the attachment to shared values and principles of the broader aid community. There were, however, some stumbling blocks in the project’s attempt to manage publicity by resorting to the BOGs. These challenges were demonstrated in the case of the press conference/BOG event held toward the end of the project in response to accusations of bad conduct by the intervention actors. Despite good intentions of project support unit and Embassy actors to use the event to convince the critics of the project’s commitment to the principles of accountability and universality, the event had ended in chaos. The learning taken away from the experience was not documented or analyzed in project documentation, but as one research explained, never again were such press conferences arranged in the framework of the project.

Finally, an ad hoc solution to tackling requests and pressure for illegal donations was a certain memo written by one of the team leaders. The memo had clearly spelled out the consequences of project staff agreeing to pay donations or accept bribes: the price of acting against the principles of anti-corruption and anti-donations was the loss of one’s job. This memo was cherished by project staff as a
valuable personal protection against any such unjustified threats, and was carried along in employees’ pockets together with the BOG document. These documents were then presented to anyone making claims toward staff members or requesting ‘donations’. This could be interpreted as the staff demonstrating its attachment to the principle of consistency: nowhere in the project was it allowed to give out donations or agree to corruption.

8.3 Semisensitivity and intuitive working in conflict

The aim of the working in conflict approach is to avoid conflict-related risks and to minimize the potential for development programs to exacerbate violence. In concurrence with the approach, as defined by Goodhand and explained in chapter two, the aid actors of the studied case project were aware of and acknowledged the conflict in the operational context. This was apparent in the many references to the history of conflict in Nepal from the early design phase documentation onwards, as well as in the narratives produced by research participants. As explained above, the successive escalation and decline of contextual political instabilities and tensions also directly affected the decision-making related to starting the project. Further corresponding to the working in conflict approach, there were several points in the dataset where an awareness of the intervention’s effect on conflict could be
detected. I found signs of this in particular in the early design phase documents from the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs in which the link between development and peace through the project’s focus on the root causes of conflict was emphasized. Some of this early documentation even explicitly called for “conflict sensitivity” or in minimum for “special considerations” to be injected into the project’s overall planning framework due to the conflict history of the operational area. Moreover, there were several recommendations and written commitments in the project’s documentation to take into consideration the “new unstable political situation,” and together with peacebuilding, conflict sensitivity was set as one of the important crosscutting issues for the project. It was also explicitly mandated in an Embassy memo that “all aid should be…conflict sensitive and inclusive,” and development was portrayed by one Embassy employee as having the potential to stabilize the political situation in Nepal through this kind of sensitive approach. These observations support a view of the project as having been carried out with a working in conflict approach, a key characteristic of which is recognizing the need to be sensitive to conflict.

A related and central feature of the working in conflict approach, according to Goodhand, is adapting program policies and interventions accordingly. This is where the perspective of the project changes. Instead of being a full-fledged case of working in conflict, the studied project’s approach could instead be portrayed as being semisensitive to peace and conflict. I use the term semisensitive here to imply that the project was only partly sensitive to the conflict-affected (or peace and conflict related reality of the) context. The recommendations for conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding remained abstract throughout the dataset, with no guidance on how to integrate or mainstream conflict sensitivity into the project’s work in practice. Unsurprisingly then, the substantial and explicit content of conflict sensitivity as a formal approach remained imperceptible in the studied intervention. What I did find in this respect was mainly linked to what I have coined above as one-way street risk management thinking. The conflict-affected operational context was present in the project’s documentation in references to “possible political instabilities” and e.g. the “physical safety situation.” As opposed to considering the context being affected by the project in some way, the suspected political instabilities were portrayed predominantly in terms of threats to the project, thus constituting an element to be considered as part of financial and other risk management. There were only a few exceptions to this. For instance one interviewed Nepali Ministry official demonstrated his awareness of the potential of development interventions having negative effects: “…in some way it [the project] may generate conflict also.”
Another example was the point in the final project document connected to assessing the impact of the project on the socio-cultural environment. It was foreseen in that document that as “long established socio-cultural practices will need to be changed...[it] may induce a negative impact on the existing socio-cultural environment, such as...unstabilisation of communities.” The solution offered in this regard was “[c]onsiderable public education...for sustainable water supply, sanitation and other water uses development.” Another notable exception to the general tendency toward one-way street thinking of the impacts of the conflict was in that “systems for learning and conflict resolution” had been set as markers of sustainability in the project. Implicit in these examples is the idea that service improvement may also bring along with it conflicting interests, differences of opinion and tensions between various project participants and stakeholders. Taking into consideration possible unintended negative effects of the project in this manner, can in itself be seen as a sign of “two-way street” conflict sensitive thinking, as suggested by Crossin and Banfield (and discussed in chapter two). Also the suggestion to arrange trainings in order to proactively prevent unintended negative effects of the project as well as the creation of sustainability markers related to systems for resolving conflicts can be viewed as concrete steps in the direction of conflict sensitive planning. However, as it turned out, the said markers had not been among those followed and reported on most closely in the framework of the project. In fact, in the case of Bhatakatiya, I failed to find any evidence of such markers having been used or followed, nor any sign of explicit systems of conflict resolution and learning having been set up at all.

Despite the repetitious proclamations in the project’s documentation about “linking the peace with the development project,” a common sentiment among project stakeholders was that thinking about the broader impacts of infrastructural development on building of peace was simply too tall an order for the project. As one former PSU employee put: it is something primarily for ex post impact evaluations to worry about. There were some among my research participants, however, who saw there to be a clear connection between the project and the broader peacebuilding and conflict transformation agenda in Nepal. For instance research participants representing the Nepali administration felt that the project’s contribution to income generating activities was positive in terms of peacebuilding due to the fact that in this way the project could be seen to respond in its part to the root causes of the past conflict. As mentioned in the previous section, the claim was also made in the project’s documentation that it was through the water use master planning (WUMP) process that the project had contributed to peace. This was seen to have happened through the WUMP reducing and resolving local water resource conflicts. I did not, however,
find anywhere in the dataset chains of thought, clearly spelled out theories of change or other evidence that would have explained in more detail how this suggested positive interaction between the development project and the process of building peace was seen to have taken place through the WUMP or otherwise in the project. The lack of such background analysis and strategic thinking about the intervention’s potential impact on peacebuilding may be seen as one of the impediments with regard to a working on conflict approach.

8.3.1 Contextual knowing

As explained in chapter two, conflict related contextual knowing is considered a central tenet of peace and conflict sensitivity. One of the factors inhibiting a thorough sensitivity to peace and conflict in the project was that the need for a solid understanding of the operational context and the reasons for it were perceived differently by various project stakeholders. In general, knowledge among research participants of the significance of localized contextual understanding for conflict sensitivity seemed limited. Of all research participants interviewed, only the thematic experts at the Embassy pointed to the need to understand the local contexts as well as the need to localize the project’s approach to each specific and current context in order to be able to implement it conflict sensitively: “You cannot stop…from increasing conflict if you don’t understand the context.” “What does it mean in the area where you work? What does inclusion mean in Achham, what does it mean in Bajhang?” These Embassy employees called for staff training on these issues, and information based on analyses, not just reliance on prior experience of working in conflict-affected areas. Despite this persuasive stance of the Embassy’s thematic experts on what adopting a conflict sensitive approach to development interventions entails, I failed to find evidence of any detailed and planned activities in the project that would have helped project actors in systematically gaining a localized understanding of the political situation, conflict background and dynamics of the various operational areas. This was possibly a consequence of the recommendations for conflict sensitivity being somewhat declaratory and unspecific in the framework of the project documentation, as mentioned above. The perspectives of the political and societal situation and past conflict that were in some way integrated into the project’s design, were predominantly on a general national level of the conflict and peacebuilding process. This had not, however, helped in identifying conflict actors, dynamics and risks locally in the various project districts. Yet it was on the local level where the tensions and risks, which did materialize toward the end of the project, were played out. These local level
instabilities and security incidents seemed to have caught the project staff as well as Embassy and MFA officials somewhat by surprise.

8.3.2 The Lumbini legacy & the intuitive way

Instead of conflict sensitive program planning based on localized, systematic and ongoing analysis of the conflict-affected context, the project practiced what could be called an **intuitive way of working in conflict**. As explained above, the project’s ability to function in a conflict-affected context was portrayed in the data as having rested heavily on the prior Finnish experience of working in the Lumbini project during the time of the civil war. The *Lumbini legacy* of working in conflict trickled into the studied project through two main avenues. The first and more profound avenue was the project’s implementation guidelines and working approach that emphasized transparency, participation and accountability, coupled with strong local presence of project actors in the operational districts. Secondly, the personal experience of several of the project’s employees of working in Lumbini zone (and other conflict areas) was explained as forming a solid foundation for working in the conflict-affected context of Far Western Nepal.

In addition to constituting a way to manage risks, as explained earlier, the **emphasis on complete transparency in the project’s activities was portrayed in the dataset as a central principle in the project’s way of working in a conflict-affected and politically unstable context.** Transparency was depicted as increasing locals’ ownership of and participation in the project, thereby linking it to the principle of accountability, as defined by Ramsbotham et al. The fact that “everything is public information” in the project was seen as enhancing local’s acceptance of the project, reducing the amount of complaints made about it, and preventing tensions. One of the methods of ensuring transparency and considered a key success factor of the project overall was the *system of public audits*. Organized locally at project implementation sites and open to anyone interested, the public audits were portrayed in the dataset as having built the trust of locals toward the project in an atmosphere of suspicion and negative prior experiences of development projects being used to enhance the position of the privileged. In reflection of the findings of Zürcher’s research concerning the difficulty of monitoring as one of the common challenges of working in remote conflict-affected areas, the system of public local audits used by

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924 Zürcher 2012.
the studied project brings a functional solution to practicing the principle of accountability in interventions carried out in remote conflict-affected contexts.

*Full transparency* as a project principle was not, however, seen as sufficient, it needed to be complemented with good communication: “Transparency is most important …but… [even] if you work very honestly, but you don’t …communicate…people think maybe something is wrong.” This awareness of the significance of communication in the project’s work had, nonetheless, not been fully translated into action in all areas of the project work. For instance, still toward the end of the project, I found signs in the dataset revealing confusion among project actors concerning their respective roles and responsibilities. Also, women and members of disadvantaged groups had been nominated as members in the user’s committees, “but nothing more,” as one project support unit employee stated. “…The modality is very nice…but in reality only a few members of the community were…handling all these financial issues. Most of the women, Dalits, the marginalized groups…don’t know about transparency. How much the community got from the project, how much from the VDC, how much from the DDC… When we went to Humla…I asked the women, the Dalits, the marginalized groups…only few, two or three people are…involved in the procurement of the materials…nearly all people, they don’t know about the funding… Of course people are… interested – [but] especially user committee chairperson, user committee treasurer, they are not so much interested to …communicate…to transfer this knowledge to other people. The conclusion on the side of the project in this regard was that “change will not come from within” and that monitoring and supervision teams needed to have a strong role in enforcing better communication. This perspective links also to the view presented by the Embassy’s thematic experts, who claimed that more support, and time allocation from their side would be needed to ensure conflict sensitivity in the project’s work. As such, a further impediment of the project’s ability to work conflict sensitively and on conflict was the lack of resources for expert thematic support.

In general, research participants explained the strong local presence of project actors in the areas of project implementation to be crucial in terms of ensuring good communication. Locally employed support NGO staff as well as the water resource advisers and technical facilitators working closely with the project VDCs and user committees were portrayed as having played a key role in facilitating a good understanding between the project and the local people in the villages where the project was carried out. These local project actors were also felt to counterbalance the challenges of various local pressures and tensions related to recruitments, project payments
and salaries etc. Further, the strong local presence of project actors can be seen as having compensated in some sense for the missing analyses of the conflict-affected context, constituting a kind of ‘learning to know the context on the go – solution’ to contextual understanding. “...[W]e had so many districts [in this project], and every one has its own dynamics, its own flow and own history, different kinds of people through which some parties emerge...there was a particular value in having presence in the districts...that we have [people] there who know[ ] who’s who and what the effect and what they are up to...”

As I have noted above, the project’s approach to working in a conflict-affected area was strongly influenced by the experience of a previous Finnish-Nepali bilateral project that had been carried out during the conflict in the Lumbini area. Key in this regard was staff members’ personal experiences and knowhow. Although the Embassy experts had strongly called for context specificity in their recommended approach to working in conflict-affected areas (pointing out that when the projects were implemented in Lumbini the country’s situation had been “totally different”), the project was planned and carried out with a strong reliance on the ability of its chosen staff to function in an appropriate way in the conflict-affected environments, based on their experiences from Lumbini. The key strategies, working principles or codes of conduct in this regard had not, however, been explicitly defined anywhere as a particular approach to working in conflict. Instead, the employees’ knowhow of working in conflict was based on what might be called a common sense approach. Central to this was the principle of neutrality, which was brought up and emphasized repeatedly by several of the research participants. One research participant representing the Nepali administration even named neutrality as a definition for working according to the Do No Harm principle: “it [do no harm] means that development actors should concentrate on their development activities only. There should be no involvement in politics, no taking sides.”

The fact that several of the project’s employees were Nepali seemed to be considered an important factor in terms of being able to function in a context with a troubled history of conflict. To this, one project support unit employee noted, however, that the Nepali staff members “hadn’t ever been there [in the project areas of the Far West] either, and they didn’t know the context at all.” Also one of the Embassy’s employees pointed out: “…the political situation is so fragile here... so it’s very difficult even for [Nepalis] to know what is really going to be disturbing or practical...” In other words, cultural understanding and command of the local language(s) were seen as an advantage to being able to function in the project areas, but it had not replaced the
lack of perspective into the more specific circumstances and conflict related dynamics of each individual project area.

A further sign of intuitive conflict sensitive thinking that seems to have come from learning in the Lumbini project, and to which I have made reference already above, was what I perceived as a fairly strong general awareness among project staff of the implicit ethical messages that are sent by project decisions, activities and staff conduct. For example one project staff member claimed: “… if our Brahmin [employees]…don’t give the good example of eating together at the same table with Dalits, no one will listen to what we try to teach [about equality and inclusion] in the project either…” Also constructing concrete, tangible infrastructure by prioritizing the most vulnerable and marginalized groups was portrayed as giving out a clear sign in the villages that this project really was meant for these people and was not yet another form of exclusion and mechanism of structural violence. “Water is just an entry point…” as one research participant explained, “if you go to the village without anything [concrete], nobody [will] believe you. After bringing water, you start to talk. They want to listen. If you just go and talk, nobody will listen. If you do something in the village…all people come. They want to hear… But from water you can change many things…” The locals of Bhatakatiya confirmed this perspective. They told me that once they saw the project really resulting in the construction of a water tap in a traditional Dalit area of the VDC, they started to trust the project. In other words, from this perspective part of what made the project able to function successfully in this context with a long history of exclusion and hardship was not just a question of the implicit ethical messages that it was sending out, but also of the explicit, tangible proof and accountability that the project was able to demonstrate.

Finally, in presenting the project’s approach to working in conflict as intuitive and semisensitive to peace and conflict, it is in place here to point out that I found notable discrepancy in the level of knowledge, understanding and usage of the notion (and concept) of conflict sensitivity among different research participants and project stakeholders. This may be seen as a further impediment to the project’s ability to act more effectively toward building peace. In addition to the quality and content of the project’s approach to working in conflict, as I have discussed in this section, the “semi-” part of sensitivity has as much to do with the level of awareness of the notion of peace and conflict sensitivity among the various research participants. For instance research participants representing the Finnish Embassy in Kathmandu, as described above, seemed to have a fairly strong belief in, and understanding of working in conflict through conflict sensitive means. They saw, for instance, a profound understanding of the context as being the key to
conflict sensitivity, and claimed that this kind of understanding would require constant surveillance and analysis due to the constant change within the operational context. They also identified the limited opportunities of thematic experts to work closely enough with individual projects in their local contexts as an impediment to making conflict sensitivity a reality in project work. This was portrayed as an organizational challenge, which I perceived as being related to their extensive workload. On the other extreme were some research participants, including representatives of the Nepali administration, the project support unit and local support organizations, some of whom had never heard of the concept of conflict sensitivity prior to my asking about it during our discussions about the project. This is not to say, however, that these project actors would necessarily have been more conflict ignorant in their approach to the project, rather it was more a question of unknown and non-established terminology in the project framework. As one research participant commented after I had explained what was meant by Do No Harm as a framework for conflict sensitive action: “Oh – I think we unknowingly applied the principle…” Nevertheless, as explained above, I found the emphasis of the intuitive mode of working in conflict to be largely on managing conflict-related risks to the project, and not so much on ensuring its contribution to peace and avoiding unintentional harm.

Toward the end of the intervention, following the increase in instabilities and tension in the project context, there was some serious self-critical reflection in the project documentation on the project’s faring in working in a conflict-affected context, and a realization of the project possibly having neglected its commitment to conflict sensitivity and in particular the importance of good communication in that. This willingness on part of the project to engage in critical self-reflection may be seen as a factor that would have the potential of enhancing a conflict sensitive approach. “Peace and security” was subsequently added into the completion report as a new component to be considered in view of sustainable community development. Security and peace, implicitly understood as the absence of open tensions and violence, were portrayed here as prerequisites for achieving sustainable results. Therefore the recommendation for the planned second phase of the project was to continue working through an approach addressing the root causes of conflict, or in other words, through a working on conflict approach.
8.3.3 Implicit awareness of the negative effects of resource transfers

As discussed in chapter two, from the examples of aid’s negative impacts gathered in many conflict and conflict-affected areas of the world, Mary Anderson’s research found the influx of resources to affect conflict dynamics through theft, as well as market, distributional, substitution and legitimization effects. A systematic review of the effects of resource transfers of the case project on conflict dynamics was beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, Anderson’s discussion of resource transfers provides for an additional perspective and useful terminology with which to discuss some of the observations made in the course of this research.

Through the narrative analysis of the dataset compiled for this study, I found there to be an implicit awareness within the project framework of the possibility that transferring resources into resource-scarce areas could result in unintended negative effects. This may be understood as having in its part enhanced the conflict sensitivity of the project. Of the data analyzed, this awareness was most clearly apparent in the intervention design. In addition to being justified by the aims for sustainability and efficiency, as well as serving the purpose of risk management, as discussed above, the emphasis of the studied intervention design on transparency, participation and accountability may be seen as demonstrating such awareness. The underlying philosophy in this regard was that the intervention would be able to build trust and cooperation among various project actors by making all project related information as widely available and accessible as possible, and by encouraging broad and inclusive participation in the project’s activities. These principles of action were seen as decreasing the possibility of suspicions toward the project, and preventing the escalation of possible existing tensions in the project areas or creating new conflicts and patterns of exclusion. The choice to maintain a continuous presence of project employees in the implementation areas can also be understood as a pre-emptive program design response to suspect or actual negative effects of the project, such as partiality, unjust distribution of resources or conflict among local project participants. By being present where the project was implemented, the familiar and locally placed project employees were able react to such suspicions and accusations and to facilitate communication without significant delay. A good example of how this worked in Bhatakatiya was in response to the market and distribution effects

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925 Anderson 1999.
of respectively creating jobs in the framework of the intervention and giving priority to Dalits in recruitment decisions. The recruitment choice of a young Dalit man for the position of community mobilizer had caused tensions among the competing applicants representing other higher caste community members. In this situation the locally placed project employees came around and had eased the conflicted atmosphere and helped to create understanding among the competitors. The project employees had explained the principles of the intervention to the community and ensured it was according to project policy that the recruitment decisions had been made. This had helped to smooth budding tensions.

The project’s guideline requesting that project related materials be procured from local markets can in turn be seen as a sign of awareness of the potential market effects of resource transfers. Instead of leaving it fully to the locals to decide where they would procure materials needed for the planned constructions, the project design meant for the business and income of the project to benefit entrepreneurs of the local areas in which the project was being implemented. In the case of Bhatakatiya this recommendation to purchase materials locally had not, however, had a strong enough guidance effect. At the beginning of the project, when the first installment of funds had been transferred to the community, there was a suspicion of theft of the money meant for project supplies. Later it became clear, however, that the money had not been stolen, but instead merely used to purchase project materials at a market further away – at a store owned by a relative of one of the user committee members. This can be seen as diversion of project funds to an area other than that intended in the project design.

A final observation of the project’s design revealing an awareness as to the effects of resource transfers was the fact that as part of it’s activities the project was to “includ[e] arrangements for settling potential conflicts and disputes related to the allocation of water resources among different sub-sectors or interest groups.” Inherent in this is an understanding that allocation of water resources may cause conflict. As described above, however, the arrangements for conflict resolution and settling of disputes seemed not to be in the focus of the project. I found this to be the case also in Bhatakatiya. Overall, there seemed to be more of a hands-off mentality with regard to complaints and tensions related to the project. The research participants representing the project support unit exclaimed that it was the responsibility of the local administration to settle disputes: “It’s not our business, it’s the business of the local administration!”

As noted above, the systematic review of the effects of the case project on conflict dynamics was beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, some of the further and easily distinguishable effects of resource transfers in the studied dataset were those on
markets, distribution and legitimization. For instance, various construction materials and office supplies had to be purchased and staff hired for the project. In other words, the project brought with it money and possibilities for employment, both of which had an effect on the existing market. The opportunity to benefit from these resources either by selling the goods needed for construction of water and sanitation systems or through employment in the project resulted in accusations of corruption, and pressuring and threats toward project actors as well as inter-group tensions among job applicants. As explained above, the project reacted to these pressures on the one hand by resorting to increased transparency (e.g. by systematically seeking three offers for all procurements) and attempting to further improve communication about the principles of action (guided by the Basic Operational Guidelines, and prioritization of lower caste and marginalized groups). On the other hand responsibility for handling complaints was directed to the local administration.

Mary Anderson’s research found that when interventions label people according to their needs and focus assistance programs accordingly, they might reinforce subgroup identities and emphasize intergroup differences. This was explained above in chapter two presenting the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of this study. The targeting of aid to certain subgroups may have good reasons from an aid provider’s perspective as priorities must be set due to limited resources, and aid must be focused on where the need is greatest. This was largely the case in the context of the studied project as well. In accordance to the findings of Anderson’s research, the targeting of aid through a poverty ranking system indeed gave rise to an incident of disagreement in Bhatakatiya. A certain member of the community had been extremely upset about the way that his family’s needs and wealth had been ranked, and threatened to pull out of the project entirely. His claim was that his family had always been excluded from development projects due to them being perceived as wealthier than others in the community. The studied project had reinforced this existing tension point by ranking this particular family in a way so as to exclude them from receiving full benefits. This was the clearest sign within the studied dataset of the project’s distribution effects through transfer of resources.

Finally, as explained in chapter two, Anderson’s research found aid to legitimize some people and actions, and to weaken or sideline others. In this regard the studied project may be seen as having had a legitimizing effect through its design of promoting the equal participation of all societal groups in the development process. By prioritizing the

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participation of Dalits and other lower caste people as well as women, the project gave these groups a legitimacy they had lacked prior to the project coming into their areas. As a local woman in Bhatakatiya explained to me: prior to the project coming to their community, the women had thought that they could not take part in making any decisions in the community due to their gender. Through the project they had learned to speak up and to state their opinions. They had learned that they too could equally take part in decision-making. Further, the intervention helped to positively legitimize these marginalized and vulnerable groups by hiring their members for jobs at the project support unit as well as in the project areas.

8.3.4 Attentiveness to messages of aid

In the same way that Anderson’s discussion of resource transfers provided for an additional perspective and useful terminology with which to discuss some of the observations made in the course of this research, so does her discussion of the messages of aid. In addition to acting as an example of promoting equality through employing lower caste persons for jobs within the project framework, as explained above, there were several other signs in the dataset of the project actors’ awareness of the implicit ethical messages that are sent out by aid actors and actions. This attentiveness to the messages of aid can be seen as yet another factor that helped to enhance the conflict sensitivity of the project. I found signs of this awareness to be apparent particularly in the attitudes of the project actors interviewed for this study. Of the list of various types of messages of aid defined through Mary Anderson’s research, I found signs of competition, different value for different life, powerlessness, and publicity in the dataset studied. I will discuss each of these in turn, followed with a more general elaboration of the awareness I perceived among research participants regarding the implicit ethical messages that are sent out by aid actors and actions.

From the interview data gathered in Bhatakatiya, I found that some of the research participants perceived there to be competition among the project’s staff in Mangalsen. This had caused locals to feel uneasy and had also to some extent decreased their trust toward these project actors. On the other hand, the locals’ narrative of the two water resource advisers being in competition with one another, might also be understood as “an attack being the best defense” against the suspicions toward themselves for suspected misuse of project funds.
I found there also to be a suspicion among the community mobilizers in Bhatakatiya of the project giving “different value for different life” regarding the level of salaries paid to the community mobilizers in various districts. One of the community mobilizers in Bhatakatiya had found out during an orientation training in Dhangadhi that the salary of a peer mobilizer in another district was higher than that paid in Bhatakatiya. This suspicion had not been weakened by the project staff’s reaction by which they threatened to decrease the salary even more should the community mobilizers not be satisfied with what they got. This reaction was in opposition to the project’s overall policy of cooperation and transparency. Moreover, this observation revealed to me that the transparency promoted within the project framework seemed to have more to do with transparency of project activities locally, and was somewhat more limited in terms of transparency of the project as a whole throughout the ten operational districts. This speaks against the principle of consistency, which requires that the response of an intervention in one location should be equivalent to intervention of the same actor in another locality, as defined in the framework of intervention ethics by Ramsbotham et al. In saying this, I do not mean to imply that the project as a whole would have been inconsistent. It is rather the perception of certain research participants that this would have been the case. In other words, the message of aid as perceived by these particular research participants in this particular instance was that of inequality: the value of community mobilizers’ work in one district was more important or valuable than the work of those in Bhatakatiya. This message had further been intensified by the project staff’s staunch reaction threatening to increase instead of alleviate this perceived inequality.

Although there was foresight within the intervention framework of various types of risks to the project from the outset, as has been discussed above, there was simultaneously a sense of powerlessness in the face of these risks, reminiscent of what Anderson has suggested as one of the typical implicit messages of aid. Mitigation of the risks was seen largely as “beyond the means of the project,” and the materialization of some of the risks, such as leakage of funds, was portrayed as “unavoidable.”

In terms of publicity, in the sense used by Anderson as clearly negative messages of aid, I found only a few incidents in the studied dataset. One of these concerned the project’s actors agreeing to pay an illegal “road tax” at a road block set up by some pressure group. This had resulted in bad publicity and negative newspaper writing about the project. In another sense, I found the project’s actors to have acted in ways that sent out positive messages about aid and the intervention studied. As
explained earlier in connection to the solutions to materialized risks, by formally acknowledging all requests and demands asserted by various individuals and pressure groups the project seriously took into consideration its relationship with all representatives of the beneficiary communities and made an effort to explain to all interested persons the aims and interests of the project. There is a positive implicit ethical message in this type of reaction by the project, which could be described as un-judgmental respect toward local aspirations, promoting the ideal of equality. From yet another perspective it can also be understood as an awareness of and concern for the project’s publicity. As some research participants put it: “[by always answering any requests toward the project]… we also promoted an image of ourselves that we are not here on any political party’s account.” and “This project is not Finnida’s project, not the government’s project, its their project…” This can also be seen as an attachment to an ideal of neutrality, strongly present particularly in the views of project support unit employees.

The point discussed above about transparency as a project principle not being enough without good communication, also reveals an awareness of the implicit messages that are sent out by an intervention’s conduct, as discussed in Mary Anderson’s research. Whereas non-communication was portrayed as easily leading to suspicion, transparency and active communication of project affairs was seen as building trust. Further, according to Anderson’s research, as explained in chapter two, intervention staff that is mindful of the potential impact of their attitudes on local people, are able to take action that can make a major difference in the kind of messages that aid sends out. Following Anderson, positive messages can be relayed by being persistent, acting as an example to others and by maintaining a consciously positive and open, trustful attitude. My observations during my visit in the project and findings from the dataset confirmed that there was an attempt at being consciously positive and open in the project. Project staff members spoke of the need to be accepting toward the lower caste people. This came up most prominently in discussions regarding hiring of Dalit staff for various jobs at the project support unit, such as housekeepers and cooks. The project staff seemed to be aware of the implicit message in this and thought it to be a good example in bringing about equality: “It’s a matter of principle for us, that all our people are able to eat that food [prepared by lower caste persons].”
According to the **working on conflict approach**, as defined by Goodhand and discussed in chapter two, aid actors are aware that all interventions can contribute to building peace, and apply peace and conflict sensitive approaches to their interventions. As explained above, *the explicit focus on conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation called for in this regard was only superficially present in the studied intervention, thus inhibiting the project from being to contribute significantly to peacebuilding.*

There was also *little to be found in the dataset in terms of concrete activities or evidence of any particular conflict sensitive approaches having been used in the framework of the project.*

The few activities mentioned in planning documents and aimed at supporting local conflict management, as well as the markers designed for tracking sustainability of the project based on the existence of systems of conflict resolution had been left largely in the sidelines of project activities focused on infrastructure development.

From this viewpoint it would seem an easy conclusion to maintain that the studied case intervention did not, in effect, work on conflict.

The intervention design and working modalities of the project, however, provide for a complementary, if not quite an entirely alternative perspective. While *the intervention design was aimed at supporting the local administration and prioritized the most remote areas and the marginalized as well as most vulnerable groups, the project’s working*
approach emphasized gender and social inclusion, equality, participation and transparency. From this standpoint the project may also be understood as having taken into consideration structural injustices and underlying sources of greed and grievance (or root causes of conflict) in the context. Among these are points considered by Goodhand as signs of working on conflict. The two most notable courses through which the studied project may be seen as having worked on conflict were the water use master planning process (WUMP) and the implementation of the strategy for gender equality and social inclusion (GESI).

The WUMP process, with its pre-defined 17-phase step-by-step approach was the main mechanism for systematically gathering context specific information about the local operational contexts. This planning format for local water use did not include specific steps for analyzing conflict-related risks, or considering the political and societal dynamics of the context. In this sense it was unable to provide project actors with exact information for instance on how to avoid exacerbating certain existing political or societal tensions in the contexts, which would be considered crucial in terms of conflict sensitivity. However, it was the step-wise process in itself (in which no shortcuts were to be taken) that may be understood as a significant way in which the project may have been able to contribute to the building of positive peace, or “peace alive” as the locals of Bhatakatiya put it. Key in this respect was the requirement of the local water use plans to be compiled as a joint effort of actors from across the various administrative levels: the District Development Committees, the Village Development Committees, the Water Resources Management Sub-Committees, as well as the men and women of the local communities. Introducing a working mechanism focused on full transparency, equality and justice, and encouraging broad and equal participation to operational contexts with histories of ambiguous power relations, injustice, exclusion and elite dominance was perceived by research participants as a significant transition in the life experiences of the local people with whom the development intervention was carried out. As one research participant explained: “through this kind of approach... we also get to tackle the roots of the conflict.” The locals of Bhatakatiya felt that the project had helped to organize them to work together for the development of the community. Not only did they voice their appreciation toward the fair treatment they had experienced through the project’s way of working in the framework of the WUMP, but they also seemed to be surprised and content that the project had actually brought something concrete to their villages.

Gender, caste and ethnic inequalities and social discrimination had been identified in the project documentation as being among the root causes of the past
conflict, giving rise in part to the Maoist movement. With its focus on the social inequities and gender, caste and ethnic barriers restricting access and participation, the *gender and social inclusion* study conducted in the framework of the intervention can be seen as an additional way in which the project aimed at coming to a deeper understanding of its operational environment. A strategy was developed based on the study, which provided guidance for project actors in dealing with some of the very elements of exclusion and prejudice that lay at the roots of the conflict. In this way, the gender and social inclusion strategy may be understood also as having aimed at making a contribution to the broader process of transformation in the local communities, beyond the immediate goals related to infrastructure construction. As such, it can be viewed as an additional sign of the working *on* conflict approach in the project, in the sense defined by Goodhand. There were several examples within the interview data where the locals of Bhatakatiya shared with me their experience of change, which may be traced to the project’s gender and social inclusion approach. One example of this was when some female members of the Bhatakatiya water user’s main committee told me how they had learned through the project that they too, as women, could be members of a committee, take part in it’s discussions and decision-making.

8.5 Reflections on intervention ethics
The principles for international intervention as suggested by Ramsbotham et al. and presented above in chapter two are those concerning impartiality, mutuality, sustainability, complementarity, reflexivity, consistency, accountability, and universality. In the preceding sections of this discussion chapter, I have already made references to these principles where they naturally linked to the themes discussed in relation to the other elements of the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study. Through an overall reflection of the framework of intervention ethics, this research reveals how the studied case project largely held with principles of mutuality, impartiality, consistency, and universality; how it held with the principles of sustainability and complementarity in varying degrees during different stages of the project, and how it did not quite fully live up to the principles of accountability and reflexivity. In the following, I will present my findings with regard to each of the principles in somewhat more detail.

8.5.1 Impartiality and/or neutrality?

According to Ramsbotham et al. the principle of impartiality suggests that regardless of the intervener’s role in a conflict-affected context, all contributions aimed at building peace fall short unless the interests of all those affected are taken into account. At the core of the principle lie the idea of win-win outcomes and the importance of responding to human needs. A parallel to impartiality is the idea of non-discrimination in response to need. The studied project may be seen to have aimed at following the principle of impartiality through its participatory design and gender and socially inclusive approach. As such, the goal of the intervention was to take into account all those affected by the project, as well as through the intervention being focused on the needs of the local recipient communities. Impartiality was also emphasized with regard to communications with conflict parties in the operational context. For instance, the planning and security mission report, launched prior to starting up the project, recommended that the project “informally exchange information and discuss issues with the Maoists and adopt a neutral, impartial status in relation to the belligerent parties.”

Ramsbotham et al. distinguish impartiality from the principle of neutrality, which in turn refers to political non-alignment and/or non-political engagement. In essence neutrality means the commitment to not take sides or engage in controversies of a political, racial, ideological or religious nature. As explained above in chapter two, according to Ramsbotham et al. the original idea of
neutrality, in the sense of operating only with the consent of all parties, gave way as an intervention principle to that of impartiality in the 1990s. As the quote above concerning information exchange with Maoists reveals, the *distinction between neutrality and impartiality was not clear-cut in the studied dataset*. In addition to the two terms being used interchangeably, *I found* several points in the dataset in which *emphasis was on the need for the intervention and its actors to be specifically neutral*. This may also have been a relict from the Lumbini project, which had been carried out during the conflict in the 1990s when the use of the notion of neutrality was still more prominent. Neutrality was seen for instance as an important principle for staff recruitments so as to “…ensure that they [local staff and NGOs] do not have any past political involvement that might jeopardize the acceptance of the project.” In addition to this, neutrality was strongly linked to ideal staff competence with regard to operating in a conflict-affected context. As one research participant put it: “…the only thing we…emphasize, is that you must be neutral, that you need to…talk with people, and that you shouldn’t reveal political color…[and] if you do have an opinion about things, it should not show at work. Because it’s precisely that, that heats up emotions.” The security and planning mission report further claimed on this point: “…all expatriate and local staff must complete a course in conflict training…[in order to be able to]…maintain[ ] a neutral attitude towards the conflicting parties.”

A final point to be made about the findings of this research with regard to neutrality relate to Mary Anderson’s research and the lessons learned from the Do No Harm –collaborative learning process, as discussed in chapter two. Anderson and others have pointed out that *aid organizations can be neutral, but aid in itself is not*. There were some subtle signs of this in Bhatakatiya VDC as well, as was demonstrated through the case of certain members of community disagreeing with their poverty ranking in the framework of the project. Crucial in terms of dealing with suspicions of impartiality here was the staff members’ intuitive ability to think on their feet and to communicate clearly to the community the reasoning behind project policies and priorities. Also important was the flexibility of the program design that allowed making changes to the decisions regarding poverty ranking.

### 8.5.2 Mutuality

As explained in chapter 2, the principle of *mutuality* has to do with the relation between the interveners and those they claim to be assisting. It determines that
interveners ensure that the intervention will more likely be seen as doing more good than harm. A sign of mutuality means taking closely into consideration the needs and desires of the recipients of aid. The principle of mutuality also demands that indigenous initiatives and capabilities be prioritized and empowered, and that interventions are carried out without damage to local economies and with due respect for local cultures.

I found several points in the dataset that indicated efforts by the studied intervention to follow the principle of mutuality. Whereas ensuring doing no harm was not so explicit in the sense implied by conflict sensitive approaches, it was strongly audible in the intentions and attitudes of the research participants: “of course we were not there to cause any harm!” The needs and desires of the recipients of aid were also ranked highly on the project’s agenda. This was mandated by the project’s design and prescribed in the implementation guidelines that called for a participatory and transparent approach.

The analysis of the actual effect of the project on the local economies in the project districts was beyond the scope of this study. However, the project implementation guidelines did distinctly prescribe an approach through which the intervention would avoid damaging the local economies. This guidance seemed also to have been followed in the sense that project materials and work force were all procured locally. Further, the mid-term review of the project found the project to have boosted the development of the local and regional service market.

Finally, despite the clear attempt to empower and prioritize indigenous capabilities (through support to local administration and decision-making as well as by contracting local NGOs as support organizations for the project), the implementation of water and sanitation systems may also be seen as having challenged the local culture and customs related to both decision-making as well as water use. Based on my analysis of the data collected for this study, the effects of the project’s challenges to local and culture related e.g. to the role of women as well as Dalits and other lower caste and vulnerable groups in decision making seemed to have been predominantly positive.

8.5.3 Sustainability

The principle of sustainability is central to development, humanitarian and conflict resolution interventions. As presented by Ramsbotham et al., it requires careful consideration of the viability and appropriateness of entry strategies with regard to the conditions in the receiving area. According to this principle, exit strategies
should in turn be determined according to the needs of those on whose behalf the intervention has been undertaken, and not on the domestic opinion of intervening countries or by the interests of intervening governments.

The theme of sustainability was explicitly present in the studied dataset and throughout the project’s design and documentation. The project’s emphasis on the aid recipients’ needs and priorities was portrayed in the dataset as “greatly improving the feeling of ownership” and thereby adding to the sustainability of the project. In the words of one of the project support unit’s employees: “…on the scheme level the Step-by-Step ensures participation and transparency and the development of abilities along the way as the construction work proceeds. Through that, the aim is increased ownership and also sustainability of the structures in the future too…”

In terms of intervention ethics as defined in Ramsbotham and other’s framework, the project demonstrated careful consideration of the viability and appropriateness of entry into the intended operational context through a security assessment of the receiving area. In other words entry was considered carefully from the perspective of aiming to avoid risks to the project and its staff. The security assessment conducted in the design phase of the project was, however, carried out on a general national level, and as such did not look to the conditions in each of the intended project districts more closely. In this sense the sustainability principle, as described by Ramsbotham et al., may be seen as having been followed only partially. Further to the point, instead of an explicit exit strategy based on the needs of those on whose behalf the intervention was undertaken, the main factor mentioned in the studied dataset concerning possible premature exit was related to rising tensions or instabilities. From this latter perspective the project may be seen as having neglected the other essential half of the principle of sustainability, as defined by Ramsbotham et al.

8.5.4 Complementarity

In the framework for intervention ethics by Ramsbotham et al., the principle of complementarity refers to relations among different interveners in a given operational context. This principle aims at ensuring that the efforts of interveners complement each other for the greater good of those for whom the intervention is undertaken. As explained in chapter two, rather than limiting diversity, the aim of the principle is to surmount the risk of “competitive altruism” by elimination of duplications and avoidance of unnecessary overlap, communication failures and potentially damaging rivalries among aid actors.
I found there to be signs of the studied intervention holding with the principle of complementarity in the dataset dating to the early (design and planning) stage of the project. Other actors working in the field of water and sanitation issues and within the same geographical area were mentioned in the early plans, and the overall guiding project document made a point about the need for harmonizing approaches among various actors in the operational area. During the implementation of the project these other actors and the studied intervention’s role vis-à-vis their work were hardly mentioned by research participants in interviews and were overall less prominently present in the dataset. The only exception to this was in connection with the tensions and political pressures related to the selection of local NGOs as support organizations for the project. Immediately after the inception phase of the project, note was taken of the inconsistency among agencies working in the field of development regarding selection and hiring criteria, and a decision was made in this project to “collect required information and coordinate with other organizations for harmonization of selection criteria among them in the future.” I did not find signs in the dataset of this having been done.

It should be noted that my perspective of the studied intervention’s holding with the principle of complementarity is limited to the case of Bhatakatiya VDC only, and that the situation may have been different in different districts and VDCs. Furthermore, it was beyond the scope of this study to conduct an analysis of the complementarity of the studied intervention with regard to all other development projects in Nepal. As for the case of Bhatakatiya, there simply were not many other actors present at all during the time of data collection, which explains the lack of perspective in this regard.

8.5.5 Consistency

The principle of consistency, as explained in chapter two, is concerned with relations between interventions taking place in different conflict arenas. The principle obligates the response of an intervention in one location to be equivalent to intervention by the same actor in another locality. By acting according to this principle the aim is for interventions to avoid double standards and accusations of hypocrisy.

Assessing the actual realization of the principle of consistency among the entire project in ten districts and over 80 VDCs was beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the observation made in the course of the research process of the
studied intervention having clear project implementation guidelines and several other project manuals to guide all of its work testifies to there having been a serious effort within the studied intervention to follow the principle of consistency. As I have explained earlier in this dissertation, the design and implementation of the studied project was a close replication of a prior Finnish-Nepali bilateral project carried out in Lumbini during the open conflict. The implementing agency (Finnish Consulting Group, FCG) was the same for both of the projects, which seemed to have made adopting the same implementing guidelines for the studied intervention easy. This in itself also speaks to the point of the intervener consultancy (FCG) aiming to function according to the principle of consistency. On the other hand, from the perspective of the requirement for context specificity issued as a central tenet of conflict sensitivity, the aim for consistency may even be seen as having gone too far. As one project employee put it: “…[project work]…in the Far Western region is …more challenging… compared with Lumbini… really, we cannot compare – the Western region and the Far West.”

In addition to these observations about the project’s work vis-à-vis the principle of consistency stemming from the implementation guidelines, there was one particular occasion in the interview data worth mentioning that revealed the value attached by research participants in Bhatakatiya to the principle. This happened when community mobilizers (CM) voiced their concerns about their pay being less than the salaries of other CMs in other districts. Attached to this story was a rumor of the water resource advisers (WRA) representing the project in Achham having put some of the money meant for salaries in to their own pockets. To make things worse, the stark attitude of one of the WRAs toward the community mobilizers who had dared to enquire about the difference in salary levels between CMs in various districts had served to reinforce rather than alleviate the rumor.

8.5.6 Accountability and reflexivity

The principles of accountability and reflexivity both call for interveners to look critically to their motives and aims in the intervention. The principle of accountability is closely related to the principle of mutuality, in that it too is concerned with the relations between various aid actors. As defined by Ramsbotham et al., the relations between interveners and those in whose name they claim to act are governed by the principle of accountability. Following the principle of accountability, when sponsors themselves become part of the intervention they are sponsoring, they should be prepared to define and defend
their motives and actions with regard to conflict parties’ or the international community’s agenda. According to Ramsbotham et al., this principle is said to place emphasis on assessments of the effectiveness of present and past operations, and is further connected to impact assessments identifying lessons learned and for improving performance.

Also discussed in chapter two, and linked to the principle of accountability, the principle of reflexivity in turn requests that interveners look at themselves critically, and ask what the aims, interests and motives for their interventions are. This principle suggests that interveners make clear to themselves and others what constituencies they represent with each particular intervention, and on what authority they are acting. The principle further recommends explicitly spelling out what kinds of advocacy is pursued with an intervention and to what avail. The rationale for this, claim Ramsbotham et al., is to ensure that interveners’ determinations are not incompatible with the declared aims of the intervention.

I found the studied intervention to be clearly portrayed throughout the dataset as being part of international efforts to end poverty in Nepal. Moreover, there were several repeated claims in the project documentation of the intervention working in support of broader peacebuilding in Nepal. Following the principle of accountability, as defined by Ramsbotham et al., with a Finnish consultancy company having a central role in the implementation of the intervention sponsored by the government of Finland, there should optimally have been a preparedness for the consultancy to reflect upon and answer for its motives and actions in both these regards. This request comes close to the principle of reflexivity, according to which interveners are required to look critically at themselves as well as their aims and interests. Although I did not find anything in the data that would have pointed to the contrary in terms of these requirements set forth by the principles of accountability and reflexivity, there was also not much that was explicit and tangible in the data in this regard either. In other words, the motives of the implementing agency were in no way spelled out in the project documentation or mentioned by research participants during interviews. The interests and aims of the government of Finland as the back donor were in turn pointed to only indirectly in the project documentation, which emphasized the project being in line with internationally recognized development goals and standards. In terms of comparative assessments of effectiveness stressed by the principle of accountability, the project was evaluated strictly based on the goals and objectives formulated in the project document. Therefore, not much can be said based on the studied dataset in terms of the project’s impact on the building of
broader peace or with regard to the project actors’ motives and actions in the intervention.

In reflection of the meager results on the question of reflexivity and accountability in the studied intervention (as discussed through the lenses provided by the framework for intervention ethics by Ramsbotham and others), it may be in place to take note of the various layers of actors in the project. When viewed from the perspective in which the main actors of the intervention were the locals themselves, a particular form of accountability emerges through the mechanism of public audits. As discussed in the section on previous research, Zürcher points to the challenges related to international donors’ and aid actors’ difficulty or inability to monitor resource flows and implementation processes in remote and conflict-affected areas. In contrast to Zürcher’s observations of many development organizations resorting to remote control aid programs, the findings of this research point to a viable solution with regard to the monitoring challenges. The studied case intervention had created a system of public local audits, which functioned as a participatory monitoring mechanism based on the ideal of full transparency and local ownership. With their emphasis on transparency, the public audits brought a structure into the intervention through which questions concerning the relations between various project actors as well as their motives and actions could – at least in theory – be discussed. As my data suggests, however, despite the public audits being considered one of the key success factors of the project, problems related to gender roles and traditional power structures prevailed, which had not been overcome during the studied time period of the project. These were mainly related to the role of women and representatives of marginalized groups for whom taking a stand and asking questions in the public domain continued to be a challenge.

8.5.7 Universality

According to Ramsbotham et al., the principle of universality sums up the other seven intervention principles into an “overall transformative cosmopolitan framework.” The principle rules that cross-border interventions conducted in the name of the international collectivity must be endorsed cross-culturally. The notion of universality is based on the idea that all actors of the international aid community would be attached to certain common values.

The project’s commitment to the Basic Operational Guideline document (BOG), created and signed by the donor community in Nepal in cooperation with the Nepalese government, was the
One most significant and clearest signs within the dataset of the intervention’s holding with the principle of universality. As one of the MFA officials maintained: “…the donor consortium created the Basic Operational Guidelines…and Finland joined in on that. – It was there that the parameters were found for the way in which international organizations can support development projects in [conflict – affected] areas…The BOGs were… a central instrument.” In addition to this the project was strongly anchored to international guidelines for development through its commitment to Finnish development cooperation, and thereby to the Millennium Development Goals, the Paris Declaration (2005) and the Accra Action Plan (2008). These latter mentioned themes, declarations and plans were, however, hardly present in the dataset at all after their being mentioned in preparatory project documents, and were never mentioned in the narratives of research participants during interviews.

8.6 Significance of the study

8.6.1 Contribution to debate on aid and conflict

Thematically and conceptually, this study takes part in the academic discussion on aid and conflict. The four-pronged theoretical and conceptual framework formulated for this study brought together various elements in this debate that have functioned as a set of lenses through which it has been possible to view and arrive at an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of carrying out a development intervention in a conflict-affected context.

While this study echoes much of what has been presented in previous research (and non-academic evaluations) in the thematic sphere of aid and conflict, it also brings new perspectives to the debate. Most notably this study has brought together a broader set of concepts and thematic lenses with which to view aid in conflict than has been done by much of the previous research in this field.

The notion of working in, on, and around conflict is not at the outset a very sophisticated theoretical apparatus. It emerged, however, in the course of this study as a central and easily comprehensible framework through which it has been possible to shed new light on the researched phenomenon and thus contribute to creating an improved understanding of it. One of the theoretical realizations of this study has thus been that the simple tri-dimensional division of working in, on or around conflict could be
used and further developed into an umbrella framework within which to integrate the other dimensions of the conceptual framework. I discuss this further in the section on suggestions for further research.

Related to the above, Jonathan Goodhand has claimed that the working on conflict approach entails awareness on part of aid actors that interventions can contribute to building peace, and application of peace and conflict sensitive approaches. Mary Anderson, in turn has asserted that the impacts of aid can be positive in terms of building peace, “but usually only where analysis of dividers and connectors is used.” I have shown with this study that it is possible for a development intervention carried out in a conflict-affected context to work on conflict even with fairly weak and uneven awareness among the various stakeholders, and with little to no understanding of the notion of peace and conflict sensitivity and without any analysis of the conflict dynamics, let alone of dividers and sources of tension and connectors and local capacities for peace. By saying this, I am not taking a stand against the necessity of awareness and analyses – rather, my point is that even without these, it is the details of how a development intervention is carried out that have the potential of contributing to building peace, or “bringing peace to life.” It is to this end of making visible the details of a development intervention that this study makes a contribution.

In terms of echoing findings of previous research, this study reinforces a common finding concerning the lack of contextual knowing. This study has shown that contextual knowing related to past and present open and/or latent conflict dynamics within the studied intervention framework was limited. No conflict analyses were carried out by any of the stakeholders at any stage of the project, and the information that had been compiled by the implementing agency about the political situation in the country was restricted to a general level of knowledge concerning the overall situation in the country at large, as opposed to looking to the specific situations within the various project districts and village development committees. These findings correspond with previous research by researchers such as Zürcher\textsuperscript{927}, Johnston and Johnson\textsuperscript{928} who have claimed weak contextual knowledge as being one of the central challenges in the way of aid being sensitive to conflict realities and not to do harm. These findings are further in line with the 2011 study by the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA), which claimed that aid actors often fail to take the time and measures to fully understand their conflict-affected operational contexts; as well as with the two evaluations commissioned by the

\textsuperscript{927} Zürcher 2012
\textsuperscript{928} Johnston and Johnson 2014
MFA in 2012 and 2014 respectively on support to the Nepalese peace process and peace and development in Finnish development cooperation. The latter mentioned studies had found that the evaluated interventions had been carried out without any comprehensive post-conflict assessments or studies combining contextual, political economy, poverty and conflict analyses to underpin a strategic approach to peacebuilding within Finnish development programs and the rationale for chosen projects. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, and also reinforcing the results of the CDA study, this research displayed that the studied case intervention was carried out by resorting largely to pre-packaged programming, without systematically taking into consideration current (latent) conflict dynamics and the realities of the aid recipients’ local contexts (including the work of other aid actors), and adjusting the project’s activities accordingly to each specific implementation context.

The findings of this research also support the observations of the 2012 and 2014 MFA evaluations as well as the findings of a Finnish group of researchers929 concerning policy guidance. These studies noted that general, higher level policy guidelines for fragile and conflict-affected situations suffer from gaps and deficiencies, and reliance on external analyses carried out by the UN or other multinational bodies, such as the Utstein Group do not provide practitioners with sufficient practical guidance for action. At the time of inquiry for this study, I found closer guidance, links and capacity building to largely be missing in establishing the connection between policy commitments concerning the interconnectedness of peace, security, human rights and development, and the way in which development aid is carried out in practice. Despite recommendations in the studied dataset to build capacity within the project on the themes of conflict management and conflict sensitivity, little if any such capacity building took place. Moreover, the guidance for these themes was non-existent in the otherwise extensive project implementation guidance material. This study additionally found the repeated proclamations about the need for conflict sensitivity and for the project to be able to contribute to building peace to be representative of what Goodhand has called a “maximalist” view of the inter-relationship of aid and conflict, according to which aid should consciously be used as an instrument for building peace. These proclamations were, however, found to be largely dead letters with little actual weight for how the intervention was carried out. As such, they may also be understood as a case of lip service to a thematic trickling in from the international donor and policy agenda.

Providing an additional and new perspective to the point concerning policy guidance established in previous research, this research found the studied project’s commitment to the Basic Operational

929 Alava et al. 2012.
Guidelines to be the only way in which the intervention may be seen as having explicitly held to the principle of universalism as a tenet of intervention ethics. This is not to claim that the commitments mentioned in early project documents to the Millennium Development Goals, the Paris Declaration and the Accra Action Plan would necessarily have been disregarded in the design, implementation and evaluation of the intervention. However, the observation that the content of these other internationally agreed principles (as well as those formulated e.g. by the OECD/DAC on working in fragile areas) was not actively present in the dataset does seem to speak on behalf of an interpretation that the existing international and national policy guidance was of insignificant weight in the day-to-day implementation of the project.

In an article from 2003, reporting their research findings on the German Development Co-operation Agency’s work, De la Haye et al. claimed that the two-fold (i.e. positive and negative) impacts of interventions are easily ignored by implementing agencies due to the demanding circumstances of project implementation in complex operational contexts. In this study, I too found that there was a certain level of ignorance regarding the possibility for two-fold impacts of development work. Rather than being a question of contextual complexity, this ignorance seemed to stem more from an innocence and lack of explicit awareness among research participants of the possibility that the intervention might unintentionally have negative effects. On the other hand, this study also showed how, side-by-side with the innocence and lack of awareness, there was simultaneously an implicit awareness within the project framework regarding the possibility that transferring resources into resource-scarce areas could result in unintended negative effects. This was most clearly apparent in the design of the intervention where it was demonstrated through the emphasis on transparency, participation and accountability. The uneven and frail awareness of the two-fold impacts of intervention may in part be understood as being a consequence of what I have termed the prominence of “one-way street” risk management thinking in the studied project.

The primacy of risk management thinking found throughout this study reinforces the findings of De la Haye et al. that point to a tendency in development cooperation measures to devise mechanisms that protect project activities from hostile environments rather than taking direct and appropriate account of conflict situations. In a similar vein and in line with the research conducted by Hossain et al., this study also revealed concerns related to aid fungibility to have affected the design and implementation of the studied case intervention. Also reinforcing the findings of Hossain et al.’s study, this research showed how transparency had been used as one of the key solutions in responding to the risk. Complementing these findings of earlier research regarding the
prevalence of risk management thinking, this study demonstrated several other ways in which the studied project responded to the perceived threats caused by the conflict-affected operational context. These included the decision to start up the project on a limited scale; emphasizing project actors’ local knowledge and contacts with local staff and beneficiaries; clarity in communication about the aims of the project; adopting a participatory approach, which was seen as minimizing the risk of political interference and resource disputes; and finally the pro-active approach to conflict management recommended by the water use master planning (WUMP) process. As a departure from previous research, this study displayed a surprising disconnect between the strong emphasis on risk management thinking on the one hand and the lack of localized, ongoing, updated risk assessments and context/conflict analyses on the other. The risk assessments carried out in the framework of the intervention were instead based on general, national level knowledge of the country’s political situation and experiences of an earlier water project carried out elsewhere in the country during the time of the conflict.

Finally, the findings of this study resonate with some of those made by the Beneficiary Impact Assessment of the Rural Village Water Resource Management Project and Education for Income Generation Program in Nepal, carried out by Sharma/Interdisciplinary Analysists in 2012. Despite the fact that enhancing security had not been the aim of either of the projects studied in Sharma’s assessment, he found their development support to have led to improved safety and security as a consequence, claiming that the studied projects had triggered many social processes, which had influenced the mindscapes and behaviors of beneficiaries. Sharma maintained that by targeting key drivers of poverty, such as limited access to water and sanitation services or lack of education, he had found that the projects had been able to strengthen “social security” within the project areas, leading to improved physical security as well. Through the committees related to the development interventions, community members had been able to carry out project activities despite political differences. Sharma found this to have strengthened social cohesion in the communities. Whereas Sharma’s inquiry focused on the impact of the studied interventions, I do not make claims in this research as to whether or not the case project of this research “built peace” or “increased tensions.” Instead, I argue in this dissertation that through particular elements of the design and working modalities of the project, the studied intervention may be seen as having taken into consideration structural injustices, underlying sources of grievance and root causes of conflict in the context, and thereby as having indirectly worked on conflict. The two main avenues through which I claim that the studied project may be understood as having
done so were the water use master planning process (WUMP) and the implementation of the strategy for gender equality and social inclusion (GESI).

8.6.2 Bridging a gap in the research of Finnish development policy

In addition to taking part in the conceptual and thematic debate on aid and conflict as discussed above, this study may further be seen as a contribution to the field of study concerning Finnish foreign, security and development policy. More specifically, this study contributes to the discussion concerning the implementation of development policy, as part of Finland’s foreign and security policy. In this latter sense this study helps to bridge what could be perceived as somewhat of a gap in the context of Finnish IR research. What more, this study does so by resorting to individuals as legitimate knowers within the sphere of IR.

Previous research revolving around the theme of broad security has been ample internationally since the 1980s, but in the Finnish research context even that has been meager.\cite{930} In a similar vein, there has been increasing interest internationally in the security-development nexus and the study of securitization of development over the past few decades, as discussed in chapter two. Yet again, there has been significantly less interest in researching specifically Finnish policies or their implementation from this perspective.\cite{931}

The main focus of this research has been on bringing about deeper understanding of the practical side of Finnish development when carried out in a conflict-affected context. Nevertheless, the sections of this dissertation discussing Finnish security, defence and development policy from the perspective of a (peace)-security-development nexus in chapter four have made visible also some of the gaps that exist between Finnish foreign and security policy and the practice of development interventions guided by those same policies. This study has thereby


\cite{931} An exception to this is recent work by Marjaana Jauhola, who has looked to the sexual ideology of Finnish peacebuilding, the foreign and security brand of Finland, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda by examining experiences of women 'written out of history,' see Marjaana Jauhola. "Decolonizing branded peacebuilding: abjected women talk back to the Finnish Women, Peace and Security agenda," International Affairs 92, no. 2 (2016) 333-351; see also Marjaana Jauhola, "Tasa-arvosta Suomen vientituote? Suomalainen tasa-arvopuhe erojen tuottajana," in Suomalaisen politiikan muroksia ja mautoksia, ed. Kari Paakkunainen (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, Politiikan ja talouden tutkimuksen laitos, 2012).
Additionally brought forth perspectives that call for more study in the future. These include the insight related to the term peace, which – despite being frequently used in Finnish policies – is not only left in the shadows of the notions of security and development, but is also left largely undefined. A further insight brought forth through this dissertation is that concerning the concept of security, which I also found to suffer of overall terminological inaccuracy. This resonates with Minna Branders’ recent research on the notion of comprehensive security in Finnish policies, in which she found it to be conceptually ambiguous, un-analytical and unclear.

8.6.3 Revisiting the research design

Many of the elements related to the design and methodology of this study as well as to the subsequent research process, have in part already been reflected upon in the course of the earlier chapters of this research report. I will thus focus here on the bigger picture of this research project as a funnel model design with a dataset consisting of two main types of data (project documentation/archival material and interview data).

In telling her story of finding her authentic cultural voice as a writer at a Ted talk conference in July 2009, the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warned of the dangers of a single story. She claimed that by hearing only a single story we risk critical misunderstanding and end up with stereotypes. As footnoted earlier, Adichie maintained that the problem with stereotypes is not so much in that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. Rather than being a question of specifically trying to avoid misunderstandings, the aim of the funnel model research design constructed for this study was to achieve a solid understanding of the project as a whole. With that said, and in reconsideration of the design constructed, it seems becoming to borrow from Adichie, who said in her talk:

I’ve always felt that it is impossible to engage with a place or person without engaging with all of the stories of that place or person.

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932 I will return to this in the section below on suggestions for further research.
934 Adichie, The Danger of a Single Story, TED talk.
It has clearly not been possible (or even desirable) to engage with “all of the stories” of the studied case project. Sounding out the intervention through many different stories on the many various levels of the project, however, has enabled me to reach my goal of arriving – if not at a complete – at least at a thorough understanding of the project. The many-stories-approach thus adopted has also made me attentive to the use of power in the research process, as Adichie suggests. This in turn has been a suitable match with some of the other aims of this study concerning inclusivity and inviting participation of individuals to act as legitimate knowers of the international/IR.

In addition to the funnel model design incorporating various levels of the intervention, also the dataset studied for this research complies with a “more-is-more-approach.” When I first presented a longer research plan including an account of the intended data to be compiled for this research project in one of the doctoral research seminars, I was told by my peers and then advisors that I could do with much less data. I was even told that I did not necessarily even have to set foot in Nepal to conduct the study; that I could most likely get enough data for one doctoral dissertation from afar, with the archival material, project documentation and a limited number of interviews in Finland. In hindsight, I admit that my peers and advisors had a point. The amount of data and number of pages I found before me to be analyzed in the part of the dataset comprising of the archival material and project documentation alone took me quite by surprise, and much longer to process than I had anticipated. Due to the order in which I analyzed the data and wrote the empirical narrative, starting with the project documentation, I also now know that it alone sufficed to produce a solid story with a clear beginning, middle and ending, and all the while complying with the guidelines used for constructing a retrospective historical narrative. It is also true that the story would only have been half as long without adding in the perspectives from the interview data. But it would have been a different story. Probably not different altogether, but it would have been a story in which the only voice heard would have been that of official project reports. A single story, as Adichie would call it. I have no doubt that without the personal viewpoints of the people involved in the project on the various levels woven in, the narrative would have been less

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Adichie maintains that it is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. “How [stories] are told, who tells them, when they’re told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another…but to make it the definite story…”
colorful (and possibly somewhat boring). It is further my contention that the way in which the research participants narrated their experience as part of the studied project was helpful in filling in gaps in the core story based on the documents only. The interview data brought the story to life and has made it easier to get a grasp of what really went on in the intervention.

In reflection to the point about whether or not it was necessary to visit the project in person, I believe that my visit to the project in Nepal and in particular to one of its local areas of implementation in Bhatakatiya VDC, Achham was critical for my being able to write this story. First of all, I would have been unable to compile even just the project documentation without the good connection that I established with the project support unit and Achham based employees who turned out to be instrumental in digging out and sending to me all of the hundreds of pages of documents that I requested. In any case I believe it would have been much slower and significantly more difficult. Secondly, and most importantly, I would not have been able to feel and understand the embodied nature of the local peoples’ experience of their lives before, during and after the conflict and during the project, had I not gone to Bhatakatiya. Even with my visit, I feel as if I only caught a tiny quick glimpse of the locals’ lives and experiences of the project. That glimpse has, however, been fundamental to my own understanding of what is entailed in carrying out a development intervention in a conflict-affected context, and in that way has had a profound impact on my later approach to and affection felt toward this research project. It has not been until now, at the time of finalizing this research report, with several years of hindsight, that I have understood how much of a fledgling the area really was in terms of the new (still dead, or dormant?) peace at the time of my visit in 2008. I now no longer wonder at all about the locals receiving me in Bhatakatiya with their initial suspicion.

Finally, I must admit that at times during the research process I felt overwhelmed by the delusion of grandeur in the research design I had created for this study. Now that the study has been completed with the design planned, however, it is up to the reader to make the assessment of whether or not I have been able to carry it out in a satisfactory way, and keep the many parts and dimensions together without excessive stumbling.
8.6.4 Implications for policy and practice

In the beginning of this dissertation I explained how the interest of knowledge for this study rose from a perceived gap between Finnish policy idea(l)s concerning the notion of broad security and the links between peace, security and development, and the way in which I understood development interventions as being carried out in practice:

I also described my understanding of the formulation and execution of policy as an interactive continuum in which I view the policy process as a cyclical or wave-like motion in time: what happens on the level of praxis feeds into the content and formulation of policy, and policy in turn affects the content and way things are done on the practical level:
From this point of departure this study took on the task of exploring one case of development intervention practice in the conflict-affected context of Nepal, and has produced new and empirically based knowledge about the topic of Finnish aid and conflict. As explained in the opening chapter of this research report, the practical relevance of this study rests in its possibility to inform both ends of the ongoing interactive policy process. Whereas I refrain from making any firm and conclusive statements about Finnish development interventions in general based on this study, I do claim this study to have shown that there is still ample room left for capacity building on the theme of aid and conflict in the sphere of Finnish development at large. The implications of this research, for both policy and practice, are discussed in the following.

*Defining peace* – One of the challenges I found in the studied project in terms of its assumed connection to peacebuilding was that “peace” had not explicitly been defined anywhere in the framework of the project. Furthermore, I found that the dominant (implicit) definition of peace was linked strongly to the absence of open physical violence and tensions as opposed to an idea of positive peace, which would include also the absence of structural violence and injustices. The compelling question that follows from this is: if peace has not been defined, how is it possible to make claims about contributing toward building it? From this perspective, a central recommendation for development actors making claims about their interventions contributing to peacebuilding, would be to define clearly what is sought by the idea of peace to which their projects are meant to contribute.

*Contribution to building peace as a formal aim & theories of change and evaluative measures to assess progress* – If and when claims are made of development interventions in conflict-affected contexts contributing to peacebuilding, such contribution needs to be included in the formal aims of the project/program. Otherwise, as this study has shown, the proclamations of contribution toward peace may end up seeming more like a case of lip service rather than real influence. Further, without a clearly defined chain of thought as to the foreseen interconnections between the project’s work and the peace sought, the effects of the project remain unclear and the assumption cannot be upheld that development aid in some mysterious, undefined way would happen to correlate with or contribute to peacebuilding. The recommendation is thus for interventions operating in conflict-affected contexts to develop a theory of change concerning the intended ways in which the project is expected to interact with and contribute to building peace through its activities. This is essential for identifying lessons learned and improving performance. Tracking and recording such contribution, in turn, requires defining and
developing specific indicators, sources of verification and evaluative measures for recording and assessing progress toward aspirations related to peacebuilding.

**Solid contextual knowing** – Announcements of the need to be sensitive to conflict and contextual tensions when working in a conflict-affected/prone context are not enough to make it happen. Working in conflict-affected contexts in a way that avoids creating new tensions in addition to not exacerbating existing ones requires in-depth understanding about the root causes and effects of conflict, as well as of past and present conflict dynamics. It means being attentive to the systemic nature of societal processes in which there are multiple overlapping and interdependent linkages between the (factors affecting development and the building of peace. It also means having access to information about and an understanding of all relevant actors in the immediate intended operational areas (in addition to the actors, and conflict and political dynamics on the national and international level). Further, it means being informed of ongoing development, peace and other societal change processes, of the actors involved in such processes, their needs, interests and aims as well as possible contested issues. Due to the dynamic nature of conflicts (whether they are open violent conflicts or latent situations of structural violence), solid contextual knowing means that analyses need to be updated regularly. None of this took place in the studied project. Yet without this kind of information it is clearly not possible to take the realities of the conflict-affected context seriously into consideration in planning and implementing interventions. This study has shown how the implementing actors of the studied project were to some extent taken by surprise toward the end of the project about prevailing tensions as well as the complexity and diverse nature of political pressures in the various districts. The conflict was not “just about the Maoists against the government forces” after all, but much more complex, and the project admitted to having largely ignored “the local manifestations of the past conflict.” This study has further shown how the analysis of the context in terms of its conflict background was limited to a very general national level perspective. Moreover, acquiring solid and timely contextual understanding of the operational area was challenged by the fervent idea of replicating the project approach from a prior Finnish funded bilateral development project. Instead of localizing the best practices of the Lumbini legacy project to the realities and tensions within each district and village development committee, its approaches and modalities were largely applied with an attitude of “one size fits all.” This was due to the lack of context specific understanding of the operational areas with all of their local tensions, ongoing political situations and intricacies of conflict dynamics. Based on the above, the primary recommendation is for
appropriate ongoing analyses, localized to the level of planned interventions, to be carried out when operating in conflict-affected areas. Secondly, once the planned conflict-affected operational areas have been analyzed, attention should be paid to using the information gathered through analyses to localizing and adjusting project work to the immediate and actual realities of each specific context and its past/present conflict dynamics.

**Being sensitive to conflict is a two-way street** – The solid understanding of the operational context in conflict-affected areas called for above is not just a question of “conflict proofing” interventions from the effects of the context, but also of taking responsibility for considering the possible unintended effects of interventions on their context as well as striving to support processes of positive societal transformation. This is a call for aid actors to maintain an open mind to the complexity of their operational contexts as well as to the possibility that aid in itself can easily contribute and be drawn into local conflict dynamics. An awareness of the possible negative effects of resource transfers, also displayed in this case study research, is not enough to prevent them. The recommendation in this regard is that a requirement to assess the effects of resource transfers and to plan programs accordingly would be assertive and binding in guidance for development interventions. Further, taking note of the current prominence and dominance of risk management thinking, as shown in this study, the recommendation here is to link conflict (as well as other thematic) analyses to risk assessments. This means developing holistic ways of analyzing the context that bring together perspectives from conflict analysis, risk management, human rights assessments and other thematic and actor-focused analyses.

**Analysis requires skills and resources** – Conducting conflict analyses, combining their results to the perspectives of other possible thematic and risk analyses carried out in the same intended operational context (and by other actors), as well as using the information thus accumulated to design and adapt programs accordingly requires human resources to be allocated for the purpose as well as a high level of analytical skills. The recommendation that follows from this is that the resources (time, money, people) and know-how necessary for conducting appropriate analyses needs to be planned for and budgeted in intervention designs. This may include capacity building for employees as well as ongoing program design support for project actors in order to ensure a shared understanding of the approach thus adopted for working in (or on) conflict.

**Through improved transparency and communication toward more trust and even better consistency** – Emphasis on transparency as a way for aid interventions to overcome
contextual challenges related to conflict is a point brought forth and recommended in previous research, and is related to the discussion concerning messages of aid. This study has shown how transparency was considered to be one of the central success factors behind the studied project’s ability to function efficiently in a conflict-affected context, and in a way that served to build trust between the project and the recipients of aid. The principle of transparency and actions making project information available were, however, considered insufficient without active, accurate and timely communication on behalf of project actors. Also, the tone in which some project actors had communicated about the intervention had been found threatening and left room for speculation, thereby weakening some locals’ trust in the project. Related to this incident was an observation that the focus of promoting transparency in the studied project mainly concerned transparency within the local operational areas, leaving transparency about project activities between various districts to lesser attention. Inconsistencies perceived by local project actors in the level of wages in the intervention in some of the other districts had eroded the trust among locals that the project was being run consistently in all areas. If one accepts the premise that transparency is a good thing for interventions operating in conflict-affected contexts, the recommendation here would be that more attention might be paid to raising awareness among project actors concerning messages of aid and the role of project representatives’ tone and content of communication, attitude and conduct in that. Another recommendation, with regard to the principle of consistency, is that ways to increase transparency through improved communication (and/or other means) on both the national and local scales could be developed.

Impartiality and neutrality, same but different? – This study has shown how the distinction between the notions of neutrality and impartiality was fuzzy and how they were in fact used interchangeably in the framework of the studied project. As discussed in connection to Ramsbotham and others’ framework of intervention principles, neutrality and impartiality are linked as concepts, yet different in meaning when inspected more closely. According to current understanding, it is specifically the notion of impartiality that is key when aiming to build peace through aid interventions. If and when such aims related to peacebuilding are set for development interventions, it would be recommended that aid actors clarify for themselves their use and definition of these concepts. This would be beneficial also in terms of being able to create indicators and other evaluative measures through which to monitor success in following these principles.
More self-reflection and spelling out of motives, aims and interests – As I have presented above, following certain ethical principles of intervention are known to help aid actors in “walking the talk” if and when interventions in conflict-affected areas are carried out, and providing that the objective is in minimum not to do harm, but rather optimally to contribute to building peace. This study has shown that among the principles discussed above, those concerning accountability and reflexivity were the ones that had least obviously been considered in the framework of the studied intervention. Interveners’ critical self-reflection about interests, aims and motives and their relations with those in whose name they are claiming to act is not important for the sake of getting to place one more tick in a box. Instead, the call for more analytical self-reflection and explicit definition of motives and interests is a question of positioning interventions and the various involved actors vis-à-vis the dynamics in a conflict setting. This would not only be helpful in terms of strengthening and clarifying the thinking within interventions concerning consistency, complementarity and impartiality, but would also contribute to increased transparency, as well as to building trust among various stakeholders of interventions. Lastly, a preparedness gathered through self-reflective analysis to define and defend the motives and actions of development interventions in conflict-affected contexts might prove to be useful in terms of bridging the gap between policy ideals and development practice when it comes to the notion of broad security and interconnections of peace/security and development.

Improve evaluative measures for monitoring meaningful participation of women and members of marginalized and vulnerable groups – This study found the participatory water use master planning process, and gender and social inclusion approach adopted by the case intervention to have been the main avenues through which the project may be seen as having contributed to building of peace (or “making peace alive”). The study has also shown how, in accordance with the gender and social inclusion strategy, the case project had nominated women and members of marginalized and vulnerable groups as proper actors in the project structure. Nevertheless, some signs were also found of this not having resulted in much more than a mere gesture. In these cases the nominated persons were not fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and/or did not have actual power, access or courage to effectively and meaningfully take part in discussions and making decisions. The second Phase of the project has already tackled this problem by introducing so-called confidence building workshops and training for women and members of
disadvantaged groups. In addition to this a further recommendation concerns the creation of indicators and/or other evaluative measures and systems of learning that would be able to more clearly monitor and record meaningful participation of women and members of other marginalized and vulnerable groups.

Strategic capacity building for development actors on working in conflict-affected and fragile contexts – The interest of knowledge at the foundations of this doctoral was related to the gap I had perceived between policy ideals of broad security and interconnections of peace and development on the one hand, and the praxis of development cooperation on the other. This study has shown how the case intervention was carried out in the absence of specific guidance for carrying out development aid in conflict-affected/fragile contexts. Since the time of the studied intervention, in 2014, a guideline note was published for strengthening implementation of development cooperation in fragile states. This is a significant step forward in the direction of bridging the policy-practice gap. Yet the guideline booklet (to be found only as an online document on the MFA website) is unlikely to be sufficient alone in building the capacity of Finnish development actors to function effectively in conflict-affected areas at large. As this research has shown, even a certain amount of awareness among certain individuals of the best practices and state of the art methods related to carrying out aid interventions in conflict-affected areas did not result in a coherent approach to working in conflict. The primary recommendation here is for the status of guidelines to be raised. This could be done by making peace and conflict sensitivity an official and mandatory crosscutting theme for all aid interventions carried out in conflict-affected contexts. Following from this is a call for broad and strategic capacity building. More work is also needed in creating ways to bring together the several existing crosscutting themes and objectives such as the human rights based framework and gender equality with these guidelines for working in conflict-affected and fragile areas.

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936 Interview [57] 2014.
8.6.5 Suggestions for further research

Writing this dissertation has given rise to some new questions and produced ideas for further areas of inquiry. I will point to some of them here, starting from the more specific and proceeding to the more abstract and theoretical.

This study has shown that despite the aims of inclusivity in the studied project there were still problems related to gender roles and traditional power structures that had not been overcome. Therefore, further research could be carried out on the participation of marginalized, silenced, vulnerable groups in community development and building peace; with a focus on the challenges and opportunities that such groups and genders face in becoming fully fledged actors taking part in the development of their communities. A closer focus of this kind of research could be on the system of public local audits and other remote management and accountability systems used in areas where security concerns prohibit or challenge access to local communities in which development interventions are carried out.

Linked to the above, this research found that there had been a number of intuitive, or common sense approaches to conflict sensitivity in the studied intervention. These included e.g. emphasis on full transparency in all project-related matters; stressing the necessity of a neutral stance by project staff regarding politics and societal tensions; a strong local presence of project actors in the areas of implementation; and an awareness of the possible negative effects of transferring resources into a poor context. The concrete meaning and significance of these approaches would constitute an interesting topic of further research that would enable further developing the notion(s) of conflict sensitivity (and possibly also working on conflict). Such research could be done partly with the existing data compiled for this study (some of the discussions with the various stakeholders cited in this study already touch upon this question), supplemented with additional interviews with stakeholders ex post the intervention.

The various processes and models of creating locally driven agreement and cooperation among aid actors on the principles of providing and receiving aid in a conflict-affected context would deserve more empirical research than has so far been the case. This idea for further research is inspired by the commitment of the studied intervention to the Basic Operational Guideline document (BOG), created and signed by the donor community in Nepal in cooperation with the Nepalese government. Moreover, the learning from the Basic Operational Guidelines and their use would be an interesting additional topic of study in itself as an example of parameters in one country for
the way in which international organizations can support development projects in conflict-affected areas.

With the insight gained through this study, I join many of the researchers cited in this dissertation and others such as Tale Steen-Johnsen938, who call for more context specific planning and implementation of aid interventions. As Steen-Johnsen rightly points out, the assumption that development projects become part and parcel of the conflict contexts in which they operate is no longer a novel thought. Yet much of the research on aid in conflict still continues to show that aid actors are not being quite as sensitive to their conflict contexts as is recommended in the burgeoning body of state of the art guidelines and recommendations. The pressing question is “why?” More empirically founded research informed e.g. by insights of organizational development/learning as well as policy implementation studies could be done to find out. Further, setting this type of inquiry into the context of Finnish peacebuilding and development actors, it could be linked to studies aimed at shedding light on whether or not and how the Finnish fragile state guidance is being accepted and translated into practice. This type of research could serve to identify what works and why and which features of development aid and the guidance continue to be a challenge in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

As part of the contextualizing of this case study, this research has helped to shed light on Finnish foreign, security and development policies from the perspective of a (peace)-security-development nexus. Additional research could be conducted on the peace-security-development nexus theme e.g. by comparing Finnish policies from this perspective with those of other Nordic countries.

As I have argued elsewhere939, and echoing writers such as Robert Ricigliano940, Luc Reyghler & Arnim Langer941 and Michelle Parlevliet, this study has reinforced for me a perceived need for various actors operating in conflict-affected and fragile contexts to recognize more explicitly “other” actors and agendas at work in the same areas. To borrow from Parlevliet “[a]ctors …need to recognise that, even though they may be mostly focused on one specific phenomenon [e.g. human rights, development, peacebuilding, or conflict resolution], they generally work in

938 Tale Steen-Johnsen, "Oil on Troubled Waters - Religious Peacebuilding in Ethiopia" (PhD diss., University of Agder, Faculty of Humanities and Education, 2014) 307.
contexts where the other phenomena are present too… As such, they need to realise that they cannot get ‘around’ [the other phenomena]…” Accordingly, the tall order for actors in the field of development is that they need to reflect on how the agendas and phenomena traditionally outside their frame of reference may affect their efforts and vice versa.942 Even in cases like the one studied in this dissertation where the aims of the peace process were noted, the practical linking of development to peacebuilding remained thin and implicit at most. Therefore, more could be done also in the field of research to help identify more precisely what the impediments to a more holistic way of action are and what, on the other hand, could be the potential facilitating factors in the aim to act more holistically.943

Finally, and related to the above, more theoretically driven inquiry could be carried out on further developing and refining the simple yet useful notion of working in, on, and around conflict by linking it to existing research and theoretical work concerning systemic approaches to peace, development and conflict transformation944, peacebuilding architecture945 as well as the role of time in conflict and peace dynamics946. The objective here would be to bring together various thematic and crosscutting approaches into a more all-inclusive and ethically principled model of intervening in conflict-affected contexts as suggested in this study.

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943 I use the term *holistic* to refer to conflict sensitive and context specific approaches that prioritize the development and peacebuilding goals of each given operational area, and that take into account the essential building blocks of sustainable and systemic peacebuilding such as those mentioned in Ricigliano’s (2013) and Reychler & Langer’s (2006) work. In addition to this my use of the term holistic encompasses what is commonly referred to in the Finnish policy debate as comprehensive approaches, which take into consideration also the work of other actors and agendas in the same operational area. See Doty and Nissinen, 2014, 193.


945 Reychler and Langer 2006; Reychler and Paffenholz (eds.) 2001.

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**WEB SOURCES**


Annex 2: Chronological list of project documents and archival material consulted

Abbreviations used in matrix

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<td>Finnish Consulting Group, Helsinki / Dhangadi</td>
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<td>Finnish Embassy in Kathmandu</td>
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**District Development Committee - Achham (1)**

Local support organization PRSDC - Achham (8)

Beneficiaries with active role in project Bhatakatiya (7)

Beneficiaries in Bhatakatiya (20)

Total number of interviews: 59

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Annex 4. Map of project areas
Annex 5: Basic Operational Guidelines

Basic Operating Guidelines agreed to by Undersigned Agencies in Nepal

Based on principles agreed internationally and in Nepal, we the undersigned have adopted the following Basic Operating Guidelines for all development and, if necessary, humanitarian assistance in Nepal.

1. We are in Nepal to contribute to improvements in the quality of life of the people of Nepal. Our assistance focuses on reducing poverty, meeting basic needs and enabling communities to become self-sufficient.

2. We work through the freely expressed wishes of local communities, and we respect the dignity of people, their culture, religion and customs.

3. We provide assistance to the poor and marginalized people of Nepal, regardless of where they live and who they are. Priorities for assistance are based on need alone, and not on any political, ethnic or religious agenda.

4. We ensure that our assistance is transparent and we involve poor people and their communities in the planning, management and implementation of programmes. We are accountable to those whom we seek to assist and to those providing the resources.

5. We seek to ensure that our assistance tackles discrimination and social exclusion, most notably based on gender, ethnicity, caste and religion.

6. We recruit staff on the basis of suitability and qualification for the job, and not on the basis of political or any other considerations.

7. We do not accept our staff and development partners being subjected to violence, abduction, harassment or intimidation, or being threatened in any manner.

8. We do not work where staff are forced to compromise core values or principles.

9. We do not accept our assistance being used for any military, political or sectarian purposes.

10. We do not make contributions to political parties and do not make any forced contributions in cash or kind.

11. Our equipment, supplies and facilities are not used for purposes other than those stated in our programme objectives. Our vehicles are not used to transport persons or goods that have no direct connection with the development programme. Our vehicles do not carry armed or uniformed personnel.

12. We do not tolerate the theft, diversion or misuse of development or humanitarian supplies. Unhindered access of such supplies is essential.

13. We urge all those concerned to allow full access by development and humanitarian personnel to all people in need of assistance, and to make available, as far as possible, all necessary facilities for their operations, and to promote the safety, security and freedom of movement of such personnel.

14. We expect and encourage all actors concerned to comply strictly with international humanitarian principles and human rights law.
Annex to the Basic Operating Guidelines:

**PROMOTION OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

The International Community recognizes that more is needed to promote the rights and inclusion of indigenous peoples and other disadvantaged groups.

The ILO Convention 169 stresses the *distinctive contributions* of indigenous and tribal peoples to the social harmony of humankind. The convention recognizes consultation, participation, mutual respect and equality as fundamental principles for its implementation and for development in general.

Convention 169 (Article 6(b)) requires governments to establish means by which these peoples can freely participate, to at least the same extent as other sectors of the population, at all levels of decision-making in elective institutions and administrative and other bodies responsible for policies and programmes which concern them.

It also requires governments to adopt special measures to ensure *equal opportunities* and equal treatment in employment for men and women from indigenous and tribal peoples.

The Government has established a task force on the implementation of ILO Convention 169 with the participation of NFDR and NEOFIN, amongst others. This task force has drafted a national action plan. The international community will support the implementation of this plan once it has been approved by the Government of Nepal.

The ILO Convention 169 promotes a peaceful approach. Any resort to violent means, threat or coercion would breach its spirit and impair the rights and freedom of others.

Whereas, ILO convention 169 stipulates that “peoples shall have the right to retain their own customs and institutions, where these are not incompatible with fundamental rights defined by the national legal system and with internationally recognized human rights”, it then continues to state that “Procedures shall be established, whenever necessary, to resolve conflicts which may arise in the application of this principle”.

The implementation of Human Rights protected by and enshrined in international law cannot be claimed by resorting to violence threats and coercion.

In Nepal, the signatories of the Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs) are committed to strive for diversity within their organizations and development programmes.

Through the Basic Operating Guidelines these development agencies are committed to Inclusion, Accountability, Transparency and Impartiality.

These development agencies recruit staff on the basis of suitability for the job and are committed to promoting workforce diversity. The signatories of the Basic Operating Guidelines do not recruit staff on the basis of political or other influence.

Furthermore, the UN Country Team of Nepal has signed its own Declaration of Joint Principles of Workforce Diversity and is committed to the inclusion of historically excluded groups and regions to professional opportunities within the UN system.

For further information and reference

For more information on the implementation of ILO 169 in Nepal, the authority to be contacted is: Ministry of Local Development, Government of Nepal.