

What is MSTC?

v 4.0

Introduction

Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts (MSTC) analysis is a collaborative 4-day workshop involving approximately 25 participants and 4 facilitators. By harnessing the collective wisdom of local actors, MSTC analyses a national or regional conflict at the macro level. The aim is to generate practical recommendations for aid positioning and strategy in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. The results can profoundly influence how organisations do the work of emergency response, long-term development, advocacy and/or peacebuilding.

World Vision International first used MSTC in 2003.

Since that time, there have been over 60 workshops in 23 countries, in every region of the world.

MSTC has been named by OECD-DAC¹ among influential macro-level

conflict analysis frameworks, evaluated by International Alert, and considered worthy of academic study.² MSTC usage is increasingly inter-agency in scope, and is reaching beyond the aid sector to engage the broader civil society. What makes MSTC unique is its emphasis on local knowledge.



MSTC Ethiopia 2008

Participatory Process

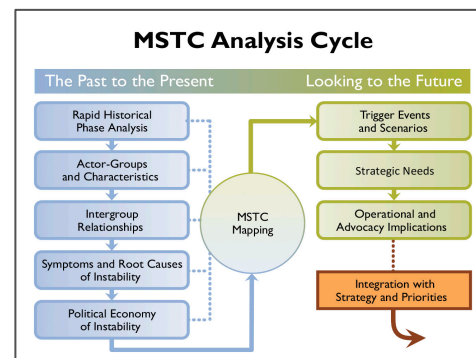
It is common for local-level analyses to engage local people, but macro-level analyses rely too often on external 'experts.' The absence of local perspectives limits understanding of conflict, and reinforces patterns of exclusion. In contrast, a participatory approach can help by diversifying perspectives and empowering local actors. Participatory forms of macro-analysis are an essential complement to expert-led approaches.

In an MSTC workshop, local aid and civil society actors are the sources of data and primary analysts. Local actors may be joined by others from government, donor agencies, think tanks, and other relevant sectors. MSTC facilitators create a safe space for all to contribute, even across lines of tension and conflict. Single-agency workshops allow an organization to focus planning around its own mandate, while multi-agency workshops can catalyse joint analysis and action within civil society.

Action-Oriented Outcomes

MSTC is designed for national or regional contexts where turbulence affects aid work on the ground. 'Turbulence' refers to long-term, cyclical instability, and involves conflict that is physically or structurally violent. Such contexts are complex and dynamic. Analysis helps aid actors to prepare for change, avoid unintentionally worsening conflict, and contribute towards peace.

MSTC participants analyse the actors, symptoms, causes and trends of turbulence. Most conflicts are multi-causal, so MSTC uses practical tools to peel away the historic, political, economic, and social layers. Political economy analysis often reveals fresh insight on how resource competition affects power relations.



MSTC is not a training event, but a hands-on analysis designed to shape aid planning. The future-oriented 'take-aways'

include identification of the context's short-term emergent scenarios and its medium-to-long-term strategic needs. On this basis, participants develop customized recommendations for aid strategy and effectiveness. When diverse participants fully engage the process, MSTC can produce world-class context analysis. For more information: <http://participate-mstc.net>

¹ OECD-DAC, 2012, *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results*, 79.

² L. Freeman and R. Fisher, 2012, 'Comparing a Problem-Solving Workshop to a Conflict Assessment Framework: Conflict Analysis Versus Conflict Assessment in Practice.' In *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 7(1), 66-80.

