



# **NETWORK AND ACTOR ANALYSIS**

## **A METHODOLOGICAL GUIDE**

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## **FRIENT is a working group made up of**

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Church Development Service - An Association of the Protestant Churches in Germany (EED), Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNS), Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), Catholic Central Agency for Development Aid/Misereor, Civil Peace Service Group (CPS Group), Platform for Civil Conflict Management/Institute for Development and Peace (INEF)

## **This guide was produced by:**

Katharina Hübner-Schmid (FriEnt/GTZ)  
Bodo von Borries (FriEnt/CPS Group), Armin Hasemann (FriEnt/FES)

## **With the assistance of:**

Michael Schnegg (Cologne University)

### **FRIENT**

#### **WORKING GROUP ON DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE (*GRUPPE FRIEDENSENTWICKLUNG*)**

c/o Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche  
Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ)

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 40

53113 Bonn, Germany

Tel. +49-228-535-3259

e-mail: [frient@bmz.bund.de](mailto:frient@bmz.bund.de)

[www.frient.de](http://www.frient.de)

The opinions voiced in this guide are the opinions of the members of the FriEnt Team listed above, but not necessarily those of the FriEnt member organizations.

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## Glossary

actor	Actors are individuals, or groups pursuing a shared goal. In most network analyses, actors are individuals. But they can also be groups, for instance civil society organizations or political parties. Actors who hold a prominent position in a network are called central actors.
bridges	We use the term "bridges" to refer to those actors who are suited to link different segments of a given network and thus serve as intermediaries or mediators. They are the opposite of polarizers.
clan	A clan is a group of relatives. Membership is determined by birth. In many societies, clans compete for influence in the political arena.
conflict	<p>A conflict is a relationship between two or more actors in which at least one actor perceives a clash of interests and feels that other actors are making it difficult for him/her to pursue his/her interests.</p> <p>What is relevant for development cooperation is, in particular, violent conflict between social groups that is causing high social and economic costs.</p>
failed state	A collapsed or disintegrating state which has lost its monopoly on force and cannot deliver fundamental governmental functions such as security for its citizens or meeting their basic needs. The failure of states is often paralleled, or caused, by protracted armed intra-state or international conflict.
polarizers	We use the term "polarizers" to describe actors who cause an ideological and social rift in the network, radicalize individual groups and exacerbate existing conflicts.
segments	Segments are subgroups of a network that are not, or barely, linked with each other.
Social network	Actors who are linked by social relationships (see below) form a social network. Alongside governmental institutions, it is often the central actors of informal networks who are important political decision-makers. Unlike statutory organizations, informal networks are almost always invisible. Social networks are highly dynamic, meaning that alliances and central actors or their positions may change quickly.
Social relationship	Examples of social relationships are kinship, friendship, or political and economic favors that are exchanged between two actors.

## ABOUT THE GUIDE

### Who is the intended audience of the guide?

The methodological guide on network and actor analysis has been written for people who are involved in planning and implementing development cooperation projects in transition and crisis countries where informal network structures are highly dominant. They include

- project directors, local partner organizations, advisers and experts
- country and sector officers in organizations' headquarters
- analysts who have been commissioned with conducting local or regional conflict analyses

### How did the guide come about?

The guide is meant to be a concrete answer to questions which were posed to the FriEnt group by the Central Asia Division of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and by the division "Governance and Democracy" in the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). They asked about the structures to which development cooperation could, and should, relate in countries where informal structures were highly dominant, informal structures being defined in this context as informal, and usually invisible, networks.

The guide was drawn up based on this question with a view to identifying and analyzing informal networks and their central actors in potential crisis countries. Possible ways of proceeding were discussed in June 2002 with network analysts from Cologne University and with experts on the Central Asian region, and were applied in a network analysis at the community level in Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, the guide was informed by varied experience gained by FriEnt team members in network analyses in Mexico and Honduras.

### What can the guide do?

It provides a set of lead questions and criteria for identifying central actors and analyzing the function of central actors in informal networks. Special attention is devoted to their role in the emergence, exacerbation and transformation of conflict. We expect that the results of such analyses will help in the preparation or implementation of development activities to take more systematic account of the functions of central actors as bridges or polarizers. It is to be expected that there will be an impact on the selection of partners and target groups, on interaction with partners and target groups, and on the development of specific project strategies.

### What can the guide not do?

It is not a universal blueprint that can be applied across the board. It must be applied in line with the given context, and adjusted to the local situation. Difficult environments such as authoritarian or dictatorial regimes, armed conflict, rampant corruption, fear and mistrust among the people will likely serve as constraints on the application and informative value of the method. The higher the level addressed by the analysis (local, regional, national) and the closer it is to the decisive power structures, the harder it will be to identify actors and their relationships. Moreover, the identification of criminal or corruption-based clientelistic networks is subject to narrow limits because of the high risk involved.

**What is the architecture of the guide?**

The guide provides practical instructions based on four building blocks for conducting a network and actor analysis at the local or regional level. It is based on the logical structure of an expert mission and consists of three parts. Part II.1. describes steps to be taken and lead questions to be asked on substantive issues prior to the analysts' departure for the region to be analyzed (preparatory phase). Part II.2. presents four specific building blocks for analysis and procedures on the ground (implementation phase). Part III. introduces deliberations on conclusions to be drawn from the results of the analysis and on possible implications for project planning.

**How can the guide be used?**

Network and actor analysis was developed as a complementary element and building block to be used as part of conflict analyses that are concerned with the conflict-sensitive adjustment or design of projects. However, it may also be useful as a stand-alone analysis in the immediate environment of a given project where account has to be taken of actors who were previously not very visible, so as to prevent impacts that exacerbate conflict and/or to reinforce impacts conducive to peace.

If you are interested in using the guide or receiving methodological advice or if you have suggestions and comments, please contact FriEnt at [frient@bmz.bund.de](mailto:frient@bmz.bund.de) or by telephone: +49 228 535-3259 (Ms Kirschner).

## I. Context and purpose

It is particularly in transition and crisis countries or regions that informal social networks play a prominent role. In such countries, statutory governmental institutions at the national, regional and local levels are often characterized by weak structures or by a weak presence, or no presence at all. In their place, informal power structures – in the form of what are often invisible networks – become parallel structures that assume central governmental tasks, especially related to security, jurisdiction, employment, creation of alternative options for economic survival, and food security.

Informal networks, or their central actors, almost always pursue their activities both within and outside formal governmental structures. Usually, their efforts focus on attaining their specific interests. This is also a characteristic of networks based on kinship or birth (clans). However, it is particularly pronounced in criminal and mafia-like networks that improve their profit opportunities by means of violence. Dynamic forces within the networks are strong. Their structure, central actors and existing alliances may change quickly if there is a change in the environment or in the goals and interests of other external and internal actors.

The strong dominance of such structures in regions such as Central Asia, including Afghanistan, or in the Horn of Africa poses special challenges to development cooperation. Informal networks have an influence on societal processes, especially on the way conflicts over political and economic power and resources are pursued. It is therefore necessary, and makes good sense, for development cooperation players to give greater attention to such structures when they select and relate to executing agencies, partners and target groups. With a view to fostering peace at the lower and medium levels of society, it is an important goal to restore the social fabric linking disintegrated, polarized segments of society. Here, too, an analysis of the role of informal actors and their relationships in the project's environment is an important prerequisite for identifying possible starting points.

The purpose of the guide is to help development projects and programs to be better informed about, and take better account of, the interests and roles of central actors in informal networks. It is an initial attempt to make an invisible thing visible and to subject it to analysis. The issue is politically sensitive because it may not necessarily be in the interest of the networks or their central players for this to happen. Again, this applies in a much more pronounced way to criminal networks that permeate formal governmental institutions.

Since the programs and projects of development cooperation and civil society cooperation intervene in existing social (im)balances and since each intervention thus strengthens/weakens certain structures and actors, such cooperation requires more systematic knowledge about the actions of central actors, so as not to exacerbate conflicts and to make more conscious use of mechanisms and authorities for conflict management. But the players in cooperation efforts also require such knowledge so as to prevent projects' services from being misused for the specific interests of central actors or being hijacked by a single network. And, not least, they require such knowledge so as to support, over the medium and long term, civil-society and governmental structures as they develop, gain legitimacy and become consolidated.

The development of the guide was based on the following key questions:

1. Which networks or central actors play a relevant role in societal conflicts at the national, regional or local level? Which central actors act as bridges in the conflict, which act as polarizers?
2. What is the geographical and political spread or reach of the informal networks and/or their central actors?
3. Do central actors (bridges and polarizers alike) have any direct or indirect influence within governmental and nongovernmental partner structures? What influence?
4. Do central actors that are relevant for the conflict have any direct or indirect influence at the user or target group level? What influence?
5. In what ways are central actors/networks/segments of networks that are relevant for the conflict using the services provided by projects? (Risk of misuse for specific interests, for instance in food security projects with food-for-work or cash-for-work activities)

The starting point for the development of this methodological guide was a field study in a rural region of Kyrgyzstan in summer 2002 as well as existing experience with network analyses in Mexico and Honduras. From our point of view, the guide thus far forms a kind of framework and requires broader openings for application and broader experience in transition and crisis countries so as to become more action oriented and usable for practitioners. It is envisaged to use it in the Caucasus and in the countries of Central Asia as part of local conflict analyses conducted by GTZ.

In the course of drawing up the guide, we established contacts and exchanged ideas with a great many of the (country and sector) experts available in Europe and Germany. It became clear that the number of experts working on the aforementioned regions and issues is currently very small. Our project involved the establishment of a database of experts (who authorized us to include them) which can be accessed via the FriEnt group. These experts share the view that there is a growing need for an operative tool for network analysis as an important complement to existing instruments of conflict analysis.

## **II. Network and actor analysis**

### **1. Preparatory phase**

The preparatory phase comprises the identification of the terms of reference of the analysis, the selection of a team of analysts, the pre-structuring of existing knowledge and the adjustment of the way of proceeding to the country-specific local context.

#### **1.1. Definition of task and terms of reference**

In order to define the task, the agency commissioning the study should provide more precise information on the main question to be examined, the goal and the practical purpose of the network or actor analysis. In that context, the following questions should be answered prior to the analysis:

- definition of the level targeted by the network analysis (local or regional?)
- In what function is the informal network/its central actors of interest for the analysis (network as an active player in a conflict; central actors within a network in terms of their potential for peace or conflict; or cooperation partners who are possible proponents of specific interests that have thus far been invisible)?



- How (with what mandate?) and through whom (local partner organizations, cooperation partners, members of local project staff?) should the team of analysts be introduced to the authorities of the region in question and to its interview partners?

The following could be **terms of reference** for a network/actor analysis within the scope of a conflict analysis:

1. What ethnic, religious, political and criminal groups are there at the local/regional level? What influence do they have? Are they relevant for the conflict? Why?
2. Which networks or actors play a relevant role in societal conflicts with a high potential for violence? What influence do women have on the conflict? What is the role of youth in the conflict?
3. Which central actors act as bridges in the conflict, which act as polarizers? Which have economic power, which have political power? Which key actors have political and economic power?
4. What is the geographical and political spread or reach of the social networks and/or their central actors?
5. Do central actors (bridges and polarizers alike) have any direct or indirect influence within partner structures? What influence?
6. Do central actors that are relevant for the conflict have any direct or indirect influence at the user or target group level? What influence?
7. In what ways are central actors/networks/segments of networks that are relevant for the conflict using the services provided by the project? (Risk of misuse for specific interests, for instance in food security projects with food-for-work or cash-for-work activities)
8. Has the project/program identified any central actors who are relevant for the conflict? Does it work together with them in any way? In what way?

## 1.2. Selection of analysts

The team of analysts should be composed, if possible, of one external and one local analyst. It should be ensured that their environment and the interviewees perceive both analysts to be largely independent. Attention should be paid to gender balance because in some cultural contexts, this is the only way to gain access to female interviewees. In order to create an atmosphere of frankness for the interviews, it is recommendable to limit the number of analysts to two. In some countries, translators will be needed, to whom the same criteria apply.

Generally, the analysts should fulfill the following **criteria**:

The **external analyst** should have good knowledge of the country and should have field experience that is as recent as possible. The analysis requires a high degree of intercultural competency and empathy. Moreover, the analyst should have methodological knowledge from the field of social science so as to be able to conduct qualitative interviews appropriately. Ideally, the external analyst boasts combined experience of conflict and network analysis. Local staff members from neighboring countries or from other project regions may also serve as external analysts.

The **local analyst** should have excellent knowledge of the context in question and excellent contacts. He or she should be aware of the main relevant actors, i.e., decision-makers and holders of knowledge in politics, administration and society in the target region. He or she should be able to identify – based on consultation with the external analyst – important interviewees and to establish contact with them. At the same time, he or she must retain a distanced, critical attitude towards the environment to be studied, and must be perceived by the interviewees to be largely independent. Depending on the structure of the organization commissioning the analysis, he/she will come from the local project team or from a partner organization.

### 1.3. Preparatory interviews

The external analyst should interview the desk officers in charge of the region in question at the headquarters of the organization commissioning the analysis, so as to develop a comprehensive package of the knowledge available in the organization prior to the exercise.

These interviews should focus on the following *general questions*:

1. What conflicts are there at the national level and in the region in question?
2. Who are important actors in those conflicts?
3. What are central issues of conflict? Which actors control access to central resources?
4. What influence and role do governmental institutions have on, and in, the conflict? What influence do informal actors have?
5. What openings for relating to central actors are there at the regional or national level?

In most cases, those commissioning the analysis will not be able to answer these questions in full. Nonetheless, the information thus gained will serve as a first introduction to the topic.

## 2. Implementation phase

Conflict situations are often characterized by distrust, extreme caution, fear and an enormous degree of self-censorship. Asking about informal actors and their social relationships is particularly problematic in this context. We therefore recommend that safe informal places be always found for interviews where interviewees will feel safe and where, desirably, it is impossible that there are any unwanted eavesdroppers (e.g., interviewing people in their homes or while they are at work in their fields, etc.). The questioning should take an indirect course and approach sensitive issues slowly. For instance, introductory questions about the identity, job and family status of the person in question may help to break the ice and build confidence. But this, too, depends on the context and must be clarified beforehand.

### 2.1. **Building block 1** Identify local knowledge and adjust methods to local context

A workshop of about half a day's duration should be conducted on the ground, with not only the external and local analysts as participants but also local staff and further people from local structures or partner organizations. The purpose of the workshop is to arrive at a shared level of knowledge about the visible power structures and the existing conflict constellations and to adjust the analytical steps described below (building blocks) to the local and regional context. This includes adjusting and specifying the question to be investigated, choosing forms and places for interviews, identifying local criteria for the selection of key informants, and formulating questions in line with the context.

The workshop should focus on the following *lead questions*:

Lead ? Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What were the central political and economic events of the past few years?</li> <li>2. What is the economic basis of people's livelihoods?</li> <li>3. Which actors control access to central resources, and how?</li> <li>4. What conflicts are there at the regional level, what conflicts are there at the national level?</li> <li>5. How much acceptance and legitimacy do formal institutions enjoy (provincial governments, judges, directors of public health centers, teachers)?</li> <li>6. How do people perceive and assess central actors at the local/regional level? What is the dominant element in their perception? (Fear? Social ties? Dependency? Attitude of dependency,...?)</li> <li>7. What influence do women have on the conflict and on potential strategies for conflict resolution?</li> </ol>
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On the basis of these questions, it should be possible to identify important key informants and some first central actors. Moreover, the answers will yield important information on how to proceed: What are the characteristics of central actors? Can they be identified on the basis of formal (visible) political and religious positions of authority? Can they only be identified indirectly (not visible, no public figures) by means of their power basis (network)?

The workshop should provide insight into the general level of knowledge available on informal actors and into people's willingness to share this knowledge with outsiders. As a result of the workshop, the team of analysts should therefore have answered, or be able to answer, the following **questions regarding procedure**:

Lead ? Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Which key informants from the project's environment need to be interviewed?</li> <li>2. Which forms of contacting them and conducting discussions/interviews appear appropriate under the given circumstances?</li> <li>3. How do the questions about central actors need to be adjusted and posed in the given context?</li> </ol>
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## 2.2. **Building block 2** Identify central actors in the network

The purpose of the second building block is to identify those actors in the region under scrutiny or in the given district who are part of a network that is relevant for the project and who play a prominent role there (central actors). To that end, central actors are identified in a series of semi-structured interviews. It is advisable to start out with the local project staff (e.g., office workers, drivers, ...) and then to interview the key informants that have already been identified.

Lead ? Questions	<p><b>Direct questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Which individuals hold positions of authority in the political or religious sphere?</li> <li>2. Which individuals control access to important resources?</li> <li>3. Which individuals are important employers?</li> <li>4. Which individuals have played a prominent role in the history of conflicts?</li> <li>5. In addition to male actors, are there also women who have particularly influential and far-reaching relationships within a given network due to their roles as doctors, teachers, etc.?</li> </ol>
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In the discussions, informants are asked to name people who hold important positions at the local and regional levels. Such information is often public and thus usually not very sensitive. Indicators that someone is a central actor include their holding religious or political positions of authority, economic prosperity, control over certain resources and facilities, the creation of economic alternatives or support provided in emergencies. If there are comparable traditional institutions that exist in parallel (e.g., council of elders), these people, too, should be included in the group of central actors.

In addition to those in positions of authority, central actors are often those who have control over access to specific resources (such as land) or to whom a larger clientele is obliged through employment. The description of the development of a conflict or some other polarizing events also sheds light on central actors. Women actors must not be disregarded. They are important communicative bridges who often work in central public spheres: doctors, midwives, healers, shop owners, operators of laundry services, teachers, parliamentarians, judges, etc. often hold prominent positions.

In an environment that is characterized by great fear and distrust, indirect forms of questioning must be used. To start the discussion, situations should be addressed in which people depend on support.

Sample ? Questions	<p><b>Indirect questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Suppose you need a large sum of money. Whom would you ask to lend you that money?</li> <li>2. All people sometimes run into problems with administrative bodies or in court. When you have such a problem, whom do you ask for help?</li> <li>3. Suppose you have a dispute with another family. Whom would you ask to help arbitrate?</li> </ol>
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The questions regarding requests for support must by all means be adjusted to the cultural context in question.

The information gained in the two steps is entered in a table. In addition to names, columns should be reserved for important characteristics.

Name	Important characteristics (religion, ...)	ethnic group/ clan	has access to	segment	polarizer/ bridge	informant	included because...

The first column shows how many times a person was named. Actors who come up in many interviews play a particularly central role. The "segment" and the "polarizers/bridges" columns are filled in later. The final columns of the table contain the name of the informant and the reasons why a person was included in the list. If all interviewees always name the same two or three people it is likely that there is a *patron-client network* with a strong power imbalance and dependency-based relationships. The people who have been named are the *patrons*, who control access to the most vital resources. If, on the other hand, a great many different people are named, it is likely that there is a decentralized network with little hierarchy.

### 2.3. **Building block 3** Identify bridges and polarizers

Once the most important actors in the network have been identified, the second step serves to visualize the positions of the actors within the network on the basis of informal links. In conflict situations, networks often disintegrate into individual parts or segments, which may be part of the conflicting parties. Within the segments, there are two kinds of actors: polarizers and bridges, either dividing the network or linking different segments. In order to understand the conflict, it is necessary to identify polarizers and bridges.

In order to identify the segments of one or several networks and the polarizers and bridges active therein, it is necessary to find interviewees from the social environment of the central actors. These informants may be doctors, academics, or directors of associations and nongovernmental organizations. As interviewees are selected, it must be ensured that informants are not directly involved in the conflict.

Lead ? Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does/do the network(s) consist of several segments?</li> <li>2. Who polarizes those segments?</li> <li>3. Who integrates different segments of one or several network(s)?</li> </ol>
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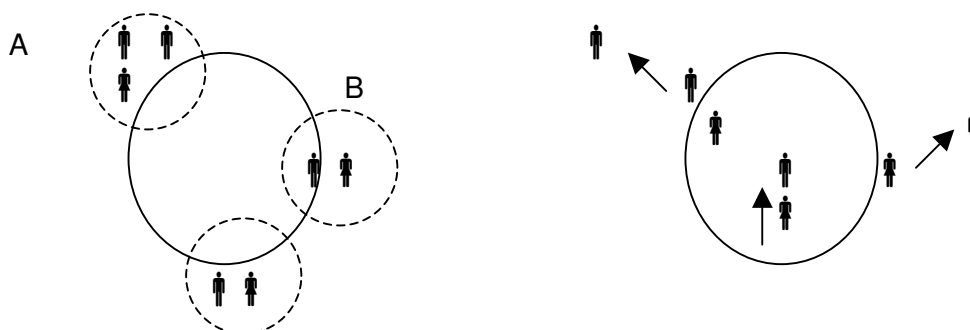
For the interviews, the analysts should keep in mind the information gathered so far, so as to probe or cross-check it with the interviewees. The interview should start out by asking about central actors. In the course of the interview, the information gained should cautiously be shared and discussed with the interviewee. Only then should questions be asked about the possible disintegration of the network into segments and about bridges and polarizers. The segments of the network often become visible in disputes in which actors had to take an unequivocal position. Such situations should be mentioned in the interview so as to get people to describe the roles of individual actors in greater detail.

The result of the interview should be an expanded and possibly modified or confirmed version of the information gathered before. The analysts then enter this information in the table produced earlier. For each person, they record which segment they belong to and whether they serve more as a bridge to other segments or as a polarizer.

The analysts then visualize the information gained in the form of a *social map*. This is a tool to analyze and systematize the information gathered. One proceeds as follows:

1. The names of all actors are written down on individual cards.
2. These "actor cards" are put together in piles, with each pile corresponding to one segment.
3. A pin board or some other surface is used which meets the following criteria:
  - You can draw on it.
  - You can attach "actor cards" to it and later move them around.
4. A large circle is drawn on this surface which will help sort the cards and piles of cards.
5. The individual actors from each "segment pile" are then sorted in relation to this circle as follows:
  - The actors of a given segment are attached around the circle in small groups (see figure at lower left) so that they continue to be recognizable as segments.
  - In a second step, a distinction is made within each segment between polarizers and bridges. The bridges of a given segment are placed within the circle, and its polarizers remain outside the circle, with strong polarizers being moved further away from the circle (see figure on the right).

The result could look as follows:


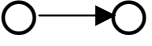
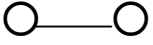

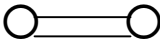


The network consists of three segments, which are represented here as circles A, B and C. In the figure on the left, bridges and polarizers have not been located yet but simply arranged

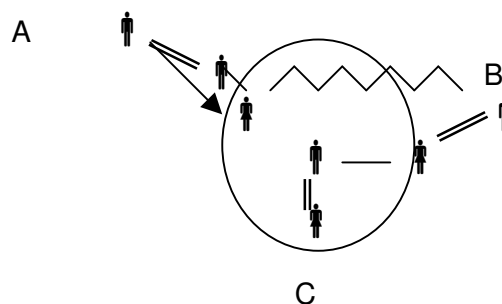
in a circle. In the figure on the right, polarizers and bridges have been located. Segment A contains two polarizers and one bridge. Segment B contains two polarizers, while both actors in segment C are bridges.

#### 2.4. **Building block 4** Conflict-related actor mapping: visualize relationships between actors

This building block serves to explore the information in greater depth and is based on the technique of conflict mapping.<sup>1</sup> On the basis of the information gathered so far, the analysts have to try to describe the kinds of relationships between the informal actors and their roles in the network in more specific terms. The results are included in the mapping undertaken in building block 3, using the following symbols:

	actor		dominance
	close relationship		conflict
	alliance		

The figure could then look as follows:



#### Interpretation:

A network of relationships comprising seven *actors* has been identified, consisting of three different *segments* (A, B and C). It can be seen that the actors make differing contributions to upholding the relationships and to balancing interests within the network: the actors in segment C are both at the center of the network. They are more interested in a balance of interests and seek to engage in communication with the other segments. They act as *bridges*. This enables them to have relationships with segment B even though one of its actors is more of a polarizer. Within network A, one strong *polarizer* has been identified who, moreover, dominates the relationship with the more conciliatory members of the segment. As a consequence, there are no, or only loose, relations between segments A and C. These relationships

<sup>1</sup> Conflict mapping was developed by *Responding to conflict* and is frequently used in conflict research. It has been adapted to the question relevant for the present endeavor, which focuses on social networks and specific social relationships. Cf. Fisher et al. 2000.

are not of a conflictive nature, however, because of the moderate attitudes inside segment C. The *main fault line of the conflict* is thus between segments A and B. Even though each of these two segments has one member with a moderate attitude, the two can barely function as bridges because the alliances within each segment are stronger and prevent direct relationships between the segments. The detour via segment C is not an option either, due to the lack of, or weak, relationships between A and C.

Such a visualization exercise can help, in particular, in analyzing highly complex networks, so as to describe the differing relationships, not only between groups or segments, but also between individuals within segments and across segments. In addition to systematizing the results of the interviews, visualization is also advantageous because its results can serve as a basis for further interviews and can be checked and adjusted in the course of those interviews.

It is important to cross-check the visualized arrangement because the figure is based on the analysts' *interpretation* of the statements of various people. Cross-checking could conceivably take place in two ways:

- Relying on another trusted individual (who has not been involved in the effort so far) from the central actors' regional environment. That individual undertakes his or her own mapping exercise independently of that of the analysts. The team of analysts later compares that map with the final result they have reached so far.
- Relying on a group of interviewees from the local project environment. Confronting the informants with the findings may, in the ensuing discussion, result in corrections and additional statements that help confirm and refine the analysis. Moreover, the discussion process can create a shared awareness among the discussants of their own roles and of the actions in the network. Since the discussion of the final findings will cover topics such as conflicts, their actors and the underlying structures, such a step can only be taken if the informants have a high degree of confidence in the analysts and in each other.

### III. Deliberations for project and program planning

The result of the conflict-related actor mapping exercise is a political and social map of the conflict. It shows the main actors as parts of informal networks. It visualizes the fault lines of the conflict and the bridges that span these fault lines. If there is a patronage structure (hierarchical network with a small number of central actors), the interests of those players who have been identified as central actors should be taken into account in the planning. These actors have power and a following which allow them, if need be, to sabotage any development support that runs counter to their interests.

They should be consulted and brought on board in the project planning phase. Their position and role should by no means be publicly delegitimized. Rather, the project team should think about how their participation in the implementation phase can be arranged without giving them a dominating role or granting them any control over project resources.

The project team should talk about how those central actors that have been identified as bridges could be strengthened with a view to a conflict-reducing, mediating role. This statement does, however, by no means apply to purely criminal networks in which bridge persons exploit their monopoly on access to various networks as "gatekeepers" so as to maximize their material gain. In all other cases it is vital to take account of the role of bridges as "sensors" and "mediators" for their social environment. This may mean that it is not necessarily advisable to include them directly in the project. An indirect role in the background may possibly be much more effective than acting directly at the project level.

The bridges act as channels of communication and, sometimes, as intermediaries between the conflicting parties and have a vast social reach, vast legitimacy and influence.

As regards the polarizers, the project team should assess their potential for radicalizing the groups to which they belong, and it should explore how the polarizers could be brought on board by means of incentives. In that regard, the central question is which incentives can be created specifically for the polarizers so as to prevent them from obstructing the formation of transparent governmental and civil-society structures.

Based on the mapping, an analysis should be undertaken of how the support provided impacts on the different actors/groups and where it might serve to exacerbate the conflict or to foster peace. A suitable way of addressing these questions is the do-no-harm approach.<sup>2</sup> The possible impact of project activities on the various bridges and polarizers should be examined with a view to whether it unintentionally favors/strengthens polarizers or consciously favors/strengthens bridges.

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<sup>2</sup> Do-no-harm analysis is currently becoming an established tool of conflict-related planning and monitoring in a variety of development institutions (cf. bibliography).