

# CONTEXTUALISED CONFLICT SENSITIVITY GUIDANCE FOR SOUTH SUDAN

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## CSRF

Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility  
SOUTH SUDAN

**SAFERWORLD**  
PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT. BUILDING SAFER LIVES



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A cattle camp across the river Nile in Bor, South Sudan. © Martina Santschi / swisspeace

# Purpose of this guidance

**Humanitarian or development assistance delivered in complex, highly contested and conflict-affected contexts such as South Sudan will inevitably impact on conflict dynamics. These may be positive or negative, direct or indirect, intentional or unintended. Conflict sensitivity is an approach that helps humanitarian and development actors maximise the potential positive, and minimise any potential negative impacts of their interventions on conflict. This document provides context-specific guidance on conflict sensitivity for agencies operating in South Sudan.**

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## 1

# Conflict sensitivity in South Sudan - the basics

## Key characteristics of conflict in South Sudan

**South Sudan has experienced different phases of conflict over decades. This has left a legacy of destruction, poverty, trauma, social division along multiple lines and violent politics. International actors have been part of the conflict dynamics in different ways. They have provided massive amounts of humanitarian and development assistance and have engaged diplomatically, including support to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended Sudan's war and eventually culminated in South Sudan's independence. As a result, they are seen as partly responsible for the new state, whilst their ongoing assistance continues to impact on the conflict context. It is critical therefore that the role of international actors in South Sudan should be considered from a conflict sensitivity perspective.**

**A large body of research and analysis exists on South Sudan's conflicts – the CSRF has brought these together in an online repository that will be updated and can be consulted for more detail. Conflict dynamics and the roles of different actors also change constantly. This section is therefore not intended to be an updated conflict analysis. Instead, it highlights three levels of conflict that have been a feature of South Sudan's conflict dynamics for a long time, and that will likely remain the backbone of any conflict analysis and conflict-sensitive engagements in future. These levels and types of conflict are inter-linked; what happens at one level can impact on conflict at other levels.**

### 1. Elite political-military competition over the state

South Sudan (and Sudan before that) has a history of military contestation for the state. This has created a tendency for zero-sum and militarised politics, where alliances between different leaders can shift regularly. It also makes the control of the oil fields – the main source of income for the state – a key asset for any group aspiring to rule the country. Political negotiations to resolve this conflict over the state have tended to focus on elite level power-sharing. Countries neighbouring South Sudan are heavily affected by the conflicts, including through refugee flows, and have important economic interests in the country. They have also been involved in South Sudan's conflicts in different ways – both in supporting peace processes and in military interventions in support of the state and/or arming of non-state fighting factions.

### 2. Citizen-state conflict

Most South Sudanese citizens experience the central state as far removed, and their local authorities – especially the chiefs – serve as their main interface with the state. Despite an early SPLM promise to “Bring the towns to the people,” only a small percentage of resources left Juba for the state level prior to the December 2013 crisis, and even less reached the county or payam level. These transfers have since decreased further. Local government remains under-resourced and under-trained, and can provide only limited services in education, health, and other spheres of service. It is often perceived that it is necessary to have a community member in a position of

power to ensure access to state resources. Populations that are under-represented in government therefore feel marginalised. Likewise, the political system of South Sudan is strongly influenced by its origins in competition and cooperation between different rebel movements from the pre-independence war. These movements tended to be violent, autocratic, and often mobilised along various ethnic lines – a tendency replicated in the current conflict.

### 3. Community conflicts over resources

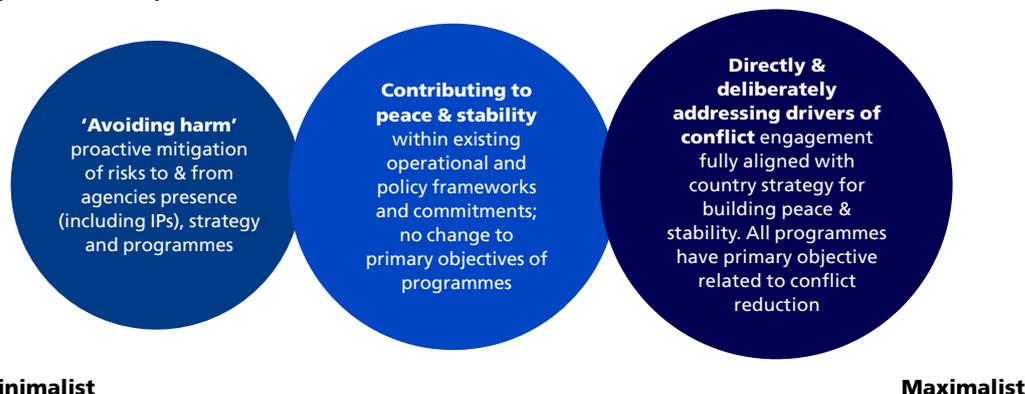
Local-level conflicts over resources like water, grazing and land, affect many communities in South Sudan. This is partly fuelled by local gender norms that associate masculinity with success in warfare, community defence and cattle raids. The traditions of 'age sets' have also been used to mobilise young men into fighting, although such groups could equally catalyse peace-promoting behaviours in the right circumstances. Chiefs have historically been responsible for adjudicating disputes, both within communities and between communities. However, this authority has diminished as traditional forms of justice struggle to keep pace with the scale of the violence, which has exploded, in part due to the prevalence of small arms, and at times, intergenerational contests with the youth. Furthermore, chiefs themselves may not be responsive to the needs of women, and may be politicised or benefit from raiding, so are not always neutral arbiters. Community-level conflict becomes even more problematic across ethnic lines, particularly if interethnic reconciliation mechanisms do not exist, or if divisions are manipulated by political or military elites. In these cases, community level conflicts play a critical role in sustaining national level conflict.

## What is conflict sensitivity?

Conflict sensitivity means understanding the context in which you are operating, understanding the interaction between your engagement and the context, and taking action to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on conflict and stability. In practice this represents a spectrum of ambition (see below).

**Minimum standard as required by OECD DAC Fragile States Principles**

**Aspiration outlined in SDG 16 and New Deal**



Approaches build on one another - even when an agency's ambition is to contribute directly to peace and stability, the minimum standard of 'avoiding harm' must be met.

Whether your programme is focused on mitigating the impacts of conflict (e.g. humanitarian assistance), resolving conflict (e.g. peacebuilding) or improving services that seem unrelated to conflict (e.g. development assistance focussed on improved access to basic services), it will inevitably impact on peace and conflict dynamics in one way or another. The introduction of aid into a resource scarce and highly contested environment such as South Sudan is an inherently political process, as it nearly always creates winners and losers and has the ability to change power dynamics within and between communities. These impacts may be positive or negative; direct or indirect; intentional or unintentional. 'Conflict sensitivity' is an umbrella term for approaches to managing these with the aim of minimising any harms and maximising positive impacts on peace.

Operationalising a conflict-sensitive approach implies three core steps: 1) understand conflict context; 2) understand how this relates to our interventions, and; 3) adapt our work accordingly. In order to be really effective, this process requires changes in personal behaviour and institutional ways of working. Implementing a conflict-sensitive approach is not solely the responsibility of programme staff, but requires management buy-in and active support if it is to achieve genuine change. This is particularly important in a context like South Sudan where international staff change regularly and important knowledge and skills for conflict-sensitive practice may be lost.

#### Overall framework for conflict sensitivity/ conflict-sensitive approaches (CSA)

| What we want to know   | How we can find out  |
|--|--|
| Why is there conflict? Who drives it and can stop it? Who is affected by it? | Conduct an analysis of conflict causes and drivers, actors and dynamics/ systems, taking into account local, national and regional levels.   |
| So what? What does it have to do with our work?                              | Review how our political positions, country strategies, programmes/ projects and operational practices are fuelling conflicts or contributing to peace; and are addressing conflict impacts. |
| What should we do about it? Is there need to change the way we work?         | Discuss and make decisions to adapt policies, strategies and programmes/ projects so that they do not fuel conflicts or empower conflict actors; and if possible, contribute to peace.       |

### Gender and conflict sensitivity

Gender dynamics play a critically important role in fuelling conflict in South Sudan. In many communities for example, young men are seen as being the defenders of the community and pressure is put on them by women and the chiefs to fight. Consequently, they often feel that they have no place in peacemaking. Women often play a complex role in conflict, at times acting as peacemakers and other times as spoilers or inciters. Likewise, chiefs (mostly older men) can play a range of roles, from encouraging intercommunal conflict and cattle raiding to supporting conflict resolution and providing justice.

Many communities in South Sudan also have age sets – peer groups for men (and often women too) who are initiated together and expected to play different roles in their communities. Traditionally the young men were responsible for community protection – a function that could translate in taking up arms to defend their community, or to participate in revenge attacks and counter-raiding. Conflict sensitivity therefore means understanding the different roles older and younger women and men play in conflict, and how any assistance provided interacts with those roles – particularly strengthening community capacities for conflict or peace.

Failure to include gender sensitivity into a conflict-sensitive approach in South Sudan may reinforce gender discriminatory practices and in that sense 'do harm'. At a minimum, gender sensitivity needs to be part of conflict-sensitive practice in the following ways:

- All analyses, assessments, community consultations, beneficiary feedback processes etc need to include the views of women, girls, men and boys (reflecting both gender and age)
- All vulnerability assessments or other measures of assessing the impacts of conflict and displacement need to differentiate between the impacts on women, girls, men and boys and address these appropriately
- All programmes (humanitarian, development, peacebuilding) should include consideration of how they will serve the needs of, and meaningfully involve, women, girls, men and boys.

## **Conflict sensitivity dilemmas and trade-offs in South Sudan**

In South Sudan conflict sensitivity often means navigating difficult dilemmas and making trade-offs. Sometimes choices have to be made between two undesirable options. Some examples include:

- Aid agencies may need to work with unaccountable, armed actors as a means to deliver humanitarian assistance; in the process they could provide legitimacy to these actors.
- Responses to restrictions to humanitarian access may affect displacement patterns, with follow-on effects for land grabbing, political contests or competition over resources.
- Capacity-building for government agencies responsible for service delivery (e.g. health and education) can be important for promoting sustainable impact, but may entail supporting broader government structures that are in active conflict with local populations.
- Support to peacebuilding efforts between two neighbouring groups may result in them allying against a common enemy elsewhere.

### **Navigating dilemmas**

Navigating dilemmas requires balancing commitments and interests, and managing risks. It is important to recognise that many dilemmas pit short-term demands against longer-term goals. Principles or values that guide decision-making can help to maintain a longer-term perspective and manage competing demands. For example, the following principles may be useful to decide whether to support a conflict resolution process:

- There are clear signs that the process will be genuinely inclusive. This will mean people from all conflict parties have a free space within which to voice their opinions without being intimidated, and that these opinions will be listened to by those in charge of the process.
- Those leading the process represent a mix of interests and affiliations – people's perceptions of them will matter a great deal.
- The outcomes of the process are clear – what will happen to the inputs? Who makes final decisions about next steps?

Lessons can sometimes be learned from initiatives in other countries, for instance the Nepal Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGS). But ultimately each context is unique and decisions have to be made by each institution or donor government – ideally in a consultative and coherent manner.

## NOTES

- 1 It has been developed by the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) - an initiative funded by the British, Swiss, and Canadian governments. The facility provides technical analysis, services and advice to support the integration of conflict sensitivity into donor strategies and donor-funded programming in South Sudan.
- 2 <https://www.csrf-southsudan.org/#research>
- 3 As alluded to a bit further down, South Sudan is also part of a wider regional conflict system, notably the conflicts with Sudan (of which some elements like the Abyei dispute remain unresolved). In addition, neighbouring countries influence the situation in South Sudan and are also impacted by it. Regional dynamics therefore form an important component of a broader understanding of the conflict dynamics in the country, and should be accounted for in programme design and implementation.
- 4 Whilst local-level, inter-ethnic conflicts are common, so is inter-ethnic co-operation and interdependency. Intra-ethnic conflicts (e.g. between clans within ethnic groups), or between groups spanning ethnic lines are equally common in South Sudan, whilst alignments between groups can change frequently. It is important therefore to avoid overly simplistic characterisations of conflict in South Sudan as being predominantly driven by ethnic allegiances.
- 5 Cf Conflict Sensitivity Consortium (2012), How to guide to conflict sensitivity, particularly sections 5 and 6 on institutional capacity assessment and development.
- 6 Definition adapted from APFO, CECORE, CHA, FEWER, International Alert, Saferworld. (2004). Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: Resource Pack. London.
- 7 This paragraph draws on Logo, K.H. (2017), Gender norms, conflict and aid, Research conducted in Rumbek and Yambio, CSRF.

## 2

# Integrating conflict sensitivity in practice

**Conflict-sensitive engagement in South Sudan needs to operate at a number of levels to be effective:**

- **Policy level – policies in place and decisions made at the ministerial or headquarter levels can help or hinder the conflict sensitivity of international actors’ engagement.**
- **Strategy level – country or sector strategies set out key areas for engagement and as such can help or hinder conflict sensitivity of the overall ‘package’ of interventions.**
- **Programme or project level – the ‘nuts and bolts’ of particular programmes or projects require careful assessment of how resources may empower or benefit some groups but not others, and how this may feed into conflict dynamics.**

**All levels of decision-making – policy, strategy/ country and programme or project – need to be informed by good conflict analysis. For a complex context like South Sudan, the analysis should be at the most appropriate level, i.e. a national/ regional level analysis will help with big picture policies and decisions, while an analysis focused on a county will be appropriate for a project in that area.**

**The following sections are structured along these levels of conflict sensitivity, explaining what needs to be done at each level. In addition, more practical tips for conducting conflict analysis and checking for conflict sensitivity are provided in the project/ programming section below.**

## Conflict-sensitive policies and institutional commitment

Many donors and NGOs in South Sudan have policies in place aimed at promoting conflict sensitivity. Staff working in such organisations should familiarise themselves with these commitments, and refer to them if they find themselves needing to argue for particular resources or changes in operating practices. In other organisations, these policies either do not exist or are not considered important. In these cases, a concerted internal advocacy campaign is needed to convince decision-makers of the utility of conflict sensitivity. Key elements of such a strategy could include:

- Reminding senior decision-makers about relevant commitments they have signed up to. This could include the OECD DAC Fragile States Principles and the New Deal, or broader commitments to ‘do no harm’ as part of aid effectiveness or organisational values, as well as core humanitarian principles and frameworks, including many of those related to humanitarian protection and accountability.
- Demonstrating how aid in South Sudan has, over decades, reinforced conflict dynamics alongside delivering important benefits to the population.
- Making the argument that if aid further fuels conflict, it means that it: i) does not achieve its primary aims and results; ii) wastes money, time and other resources; iii) potentially endangers staff, partners and beneficiaries.

- Using examples from the projects and programmes in South Sudan (preferably within your own institution) where unintended impacts of the work have fuelled conflict dynamics.

#### **Suggested resources:**

Bennett, J., Pantuliano, S., Fenton, W., Vaux, A., Barnett, C. and Brusset, E. (2010), *Aiding the Peace: A Multi-Donor Evaluation of Support to Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities in Southern Sudan 2005-2010*, ITAD Ltd. United Kingdom

Chr. Michelsen Institute (2016), *Country Evaluation Brief: South Sudan, Report 6/2016*, NORAD.

## **Conflict-sensitive strategies**

Considering conflict sensitivity in the design of country or sector strategies is essential if subsequent activities are to avoid exacerbating tensions, and contribute to peace. This is particularly important as agencies in South Sudan often engage in both humanitarian and development interventions simultaneously. As such, they can face many tricky dilemmas, such as balancing longer-term sustainable peace and poverty reduction objectives with immediate humanitarian imperatives.

A conflict-sensitive strategy can help an organisation navigate these trade-offs, for example by being clear at management and staff level about the impacts they want to achieve. One way of thinking about this is to plot the organisation and its activities on the 'Conflict sensitivity continuum' or 'spectrum of ambition' outlined above.

In South Sudan, donors have worked on different areas in this continuum in the past 10 years, depending on the predominant theory of change for their strategies at the time. Each shift entailed specific assumptions e.g. that development will deliver peace. Yet development that ignores political dynamics or reinforces non-inclusive power structures does not promote peace. Instead it increases the risk for violent conflict through the resources it introduces into the context. It is therefore important to examine core strategic assumptions as part of conflict sensitive practice.

#### **Example of strategic level CS:**

Providing humanitarian assistance in South Sudan saves lives and relieves suffering. It also means the international community, not the government, takes care of South Sudanese citizens, not the government. Does this mean it frees up the government to spend its time and resources on other things? Or that it reduces public pressure on the government to stop the conflict?

The first step in seeking to address these sorts of strategic dilemmas is in recognising it as such – there is no 'correct' answer, only a weighing up of impacts and mitigation strategies. The next step is to work with other humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors to develop comprehensive strategies that seek to respond to immediate needs, whilst concurrently supporting community empowerment, political reform and local ability and opportunity to demand services from legitimate duty bearers.

## Conflict-sensitive programmes and projects

Conflict-sensitive practice should be considered at all stages in the programme cycle; from preparation and design, through to the evaluation and re-design of interventions. The guidelines provided below support integration of conflict-sensitivity across this cycle, tailored to South Sudan.

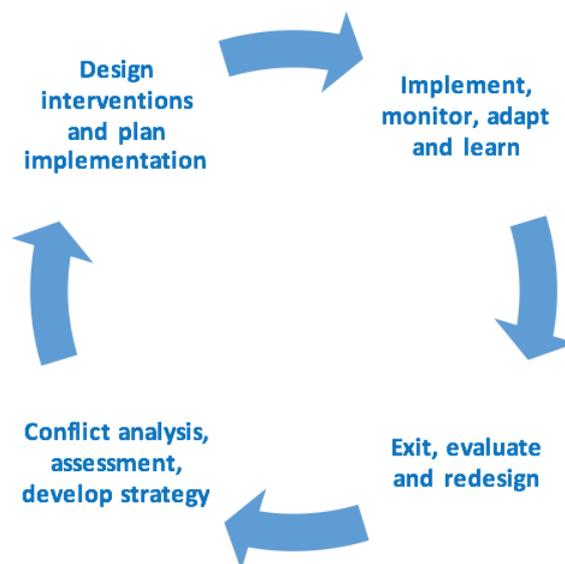


Figure 2: A basic programme cycle

### i Conduct conflict analysis

The first step is to ensure an adequate understanding of the conflict dynamics and systems. This can be done as a stand-alone exercise or as part of existing analysis processes (on e.g. political economy analysis, or a needs assessment). It should be conducted during the design of an intervention, or at the start of involvement in a country, and be updated at regular points through the engagement.

A conflict analysis should include assessment of:

- The broad conflict context (history, society, demographics, identity groups, gender norms, political systems, economy, cross-border dynamics etc).
- The main issues that are causing grievances, divisions and violence. These can also be considered as one or more conflict systems: issues can be causes or consequences of other issues. This helps in understanding how actors can steer or interrupt conflict systems over time. These issues may also play out differently for men and women and for people of different ages and ethnic backgrounds.
- The most significant actors in the conflict context and the relationships between these actors. Again, it is important to consider gender, age and other identities when analysing the actors.
- Opportunities for peace and conflict resolution (processes and people).

### Tools for conflict analysis

There are many tools available for conflict analysis – a selection is provided below:

- **USAID’s Conflict Assessment Framework (CAF, updated in 2012):** is ‘a process undertaken to identify and understand the dynamic of violence and instability’. It stresses intellectual honesty and integrity to maintain transparency and protect sensitive information, and the need to actively seek information from diverse stakeholders.
- **DFID’s Joint Analysis of Conflict and Security (JACS):** is ‘a cross-departmental analysis that provides a shared systematic understanding of conflict and instability, including causes and manifestations of conflict, and key actors.’
- **CDA Collaborative Learning Projects’ Designing Strategic Initiatives to Impact Conflict Systems: Systems Approaches to Peacebuilding. A Resource Manual (2016):** Provides explanation of the systems approach to conflict analysis and peacebuilding, and step by step guidance on how to do it.
- **Conciliation Resources’ “Gender and conflict analysis toolkit for peacebuilders” (2015) and Saferworld’s “Gender analysis of conflict toolkit (2016):** focusses on how to analyse gender and conflict.
- **Responding to Conflict’s “Working with conflict: Skills & strategies for action” (2007):** collates a large number of conflict analysis tools and explains how to use them – many can be used at community level.

### Top tips for conflict analysis in South Sudan

- **Some conflict issues are more long-term and structural and will be there for many more years. Gain a good understanding of these issues, and use that as the ‘backbone’ of your analysis, mapping more volatile events and dynamics against these. For instance, in South Sudan there is a constant shifting of specific political leaders’ alliances, but this does not change the underlying conflict dynamic around violent contestation for the state.**
- **Do not try to have a written and detailed analysis for everything. This will overwhelm your ability to digest and reflect on the analysis. Focus instead on the long-term and structural issues and use this document as a foundational document for the programme. Update it annually or biannually. In-between, get more light-touch analysis including conversations with people who follow the issues, to help you keep track and respond to quick changes in the context.**
- **Make sure all your analyses – whether detailed and written down or based on conversations – is used to inform your interventions and shared with colleagues. Consider creative ways to share analysis without adding to everybody’s overload. For instance, consider regular ‘conflict analysis update speed dating’ sessions. Ask each colleague to prepare two points of conflict updates they heard in the last week, and to make two 2-minute presentations to other colleagues. From there the information can spread more informally. Someone should then be responsible for bringing all the 2-minute presentations together. This can be an informal role, and can be rotated across the team.**

## ii Programme strategy and design

Potential conflict and peace impacts of interventions should be reviewed at the design phase as the conflict analysis is completed, but also during implementation. In South Sudan, the following issues are particularly important to track and understand the political economy of the area of intervention.

### Understand the political economy of the area of intervention

What are the characteristics of the targeted beneficiaries? How do they differ from non-beneficiaries? Are there ethnic, religious, tribal, clan, gender, or economic differences? Are they subject to the same customary, civil, or military laws? Are they in government- or opposition-controlled areas?

**Example:** In South Sudan, political economies are shaped around power relationships at the national and sub-national levels, so that complex community conflicts over resources at the local level often (but not always) have links to interests of political elites at the centre. This means that sometimes conflicts that seem possible to resolve at the local level, are not resolved, because incentives at the centre keep driving them.

What are the key governance challenges or security threats and the political or security alliances at work in your area of engagement? Who are the key actors, what are their motivations, and to whom are they accountable? How is competition over power and resources managed? Are there links between e.g. the county or payam-level conflicts and the national ones? What is the nature of these links?

How is aid allocated or managed by payam, county or state authority structures? Who are you empowering? What are their political and security considerations and incentives?

#### Suggested resources:

Leonardi, Cherry. (2015), *Dealing with Government in South Sudan: Histories of Chiefship, Community and State*. James Currey.

Maxwell, Daniel et al. (2015), *Questions and Challenges Raised by a Large-Scale Humanitarian Operation in South Sudan*, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium.

Santschi, Martina (2016), *Encountering and 'Capturing' Hakuma. Negotiating Statehood and Authority in Northern Bahr El-Ghazal State, South Sudan*. Doctoral thesis, University of Bern.

### Understand the market economy of the area of intervention

Who controls or participates in trade and economic activities (oil, non-oil)? How is trade managed by the authorities/ other stakeholders? What are the connections between trade at the sub-national (payam, county, state) and the national levels? What types of power and interests manifest at these levels? Which resources are controlled by men and which by women?

Which other communities are linked in trade with this community? Does this provide opportunities for collaboration and peaceful coexistence? Is this mostly through specific groups, e.g. women traders or older men?

How does aid disrupt or reinforce economic linkages within and between communities? Does it disrupt certain linkages (e.g. women traders) while reinforcing others? Do aid items find themselves into the local market?

**Example:** Despite the presence of destabilising conflict at times between former Lakes and Unity states, capacities for peace exist (and have often prevailed since 2014), in part because the communities on either side see themselves as having complementary livelihood systems: when there is drought in Lakes, there is enough to eat in Unity; when there is flooding in Unity, there is enough in Lakes. Trade between the two has the ability to reinforce a model of coexistence.

**Suggested resources:**

Mosel, Irina and Emily Henderson (2015), Markets in crises: South Sudan case study. Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

Nyaba, Peter Adwok (2002), Report on the Trade Consultancy Conducted in Northern Bahr el Ghazal. London: Save the Children, UK.

Walraet, Anne (2008), Governance, violence and the struggle for economic regulation in South Sudan: the case of Budi County (Eastern Equatoria). *Afrika focus*, 21: 2. pp. 53-70.

## Understand population and displacement patterns

What are the current trends of, and incentives behind, population movement and displacement? How does this break down in terms of ethnicity, gender, age?

What are the environmental, economic, security, and political implications of these movements? Which ethnic or political groups are seen to be strengthened or weakened by these movements? Whose land is being occupied, or vacated? Is this driven by political agendas?

How does aid change incentives for movement? With what implications?

**Example:** After rounds of destabilising conflict between the Lou Nuer and Murle of Pibor in 2012-2013, groups of Murle began moving to Akobo to access food and goods which were more available there due to both assistance provision and trade with Ethiopia. This provided a platform and incentive for the return of cattle and abducted children and a period of relative stability.

**Suggested resources:**

Arensen, Michael (2016), If we leave we are killed. Lessons learned from South Sudan Protection of Civilian Sites (2013-2016). International Organization for Migration South Sudan.

Boyce, Michael and Mark Yarnell (2015), South Sudan: A nation uprooted. Refugees International.

Johnson, Christine et al. (2016), Developing strategic responses to displacement in South Sudan. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

Martin, Ellen and Nina Sluga (2011), Sanctuary in the city? Urban displacement and vulnerability in Yei, South Sudan. Overseas Development Institute.

## Understand how livelihood and cultural systems interact with aid

What are the optimal, in the circumstances, livelihood options for the populations with whom you are interacting? Does it require pastoralism or seasonal movement? If so, would movement require crossing the territory of an opposing group?

What are the internal mechanisms for managing livelihood systems and the gendered impacts of this? What conflicts arise from these?

How do cultural conceptions and gender norms shape options and approaches for conflict and conflict resolution? Are you working with, or against these cultural norms? Why? How does aid affect those options and the mechanisms for managing them?

How do gender roles and norms of masculinity and femininity interact with conflict dynamics?

**Example:** Educational systems that require students to be in fixed locations for the majority of the year disadvantage communities and families that depend on pastoralist lifestyles. Efforts to sedentarise these communities undermine their livelihood and traditional authority structures, which can lessen their resilience to pressure to participate in violent conflict.

### Suggested resources:

Hutchinson, S. E. and Pendle N. R. (2015), Violence, legitimacy, and prophecy: Nuer struggles with uncertainty in South Sudan. *American Ethnologist*, 42: 415–430.

Leonardi, Cherry and Martina, Santschi (2016), *Dividing Communities in South Sudan and Northern Uganda: Boundary Disputes and Land Governance*. Nairobi. Rift Valley Institute.

Maxwell, Daniel et al. (2015), *Questions and Challenges Raised by a Large-Scale Humanitarian Operation in South Sudan*, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium.

Wilson, Jacqueline (2014), *Local Peace Processes in Sudan and South Sudan*. United States Institute of Peace.

### NOTES

- 8 See for example ICRC Professional Standards for Protection Work, Sphere Protection Principles, Minimum Inter-Agency Standards for Protection Mainstreaming and the HAP Standards in Accountability and Quality Management.

### iii Implementation, operations and administration

Organisations can affect the conflict dynamics of a given context as much through how they operate as through their strategic approaches. The table below provides areas where donors and implementing partners working in South Sudan sometimes struggle to be conflict sensitive.

|                                      | Key questions   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Procurement                          | <p><b>Who benefits economically from your procurement? How does this impact local politics and security? Does this coincide with ethnic or regional identities?</b></p> <p>Example: Hiring contractors that are from certain parts of the country or have links to particular groups (including members of the political elite) could create the impression that the organisation is biased in its procurement procedures and providing resources to a particular group.</p>  |
| Human resources and staffing         | <p><b>Does your staffing profile reflect local demographics? Is it perceived that certain groups are capturing or directing aid in this area? How can this be changed to reflect inclusivity?</b></p> <p>Example: Many in South Sudan, including staff working for international organisations, have been personally affected by the conflict. This trauma can impact on how they view people from different communities or parts of the country. In turn, this could influence the analysis organisations conduct, or their programme strategies. It is important to recognise this dynamic and work in a targeted way with staff to ensure that the benefits of local experience and knowledge are maximised.</p> |
| Communications and implicit messages | <p><b>How is aid being interpreted? How are you communicating your intentions and mandate? Does your aid provide legitimacy or power to any individual or group? How will they use this legitimacy and power?</b></p> <p>Example: Local authorities will sometimes claim and receive credit for “bringing” aid to their communities even if they were not consulted or part of the aid provision process. Thus, aid agencies may unintentionally provide political legitimacy to leaders or agendas they do not support.</p>  |
| Local bureaucracy and administration | <p><b>How are local bureaucratic or administrative regulations affecting who your aid reaches? How do they affect power dynamics in targeted communities?</b></p> <p>Example: Common examples of bureaucratic impediments faced by agencies in South Sudan include delays or refusal to issue visas, work permits, registration, tax exemption, vehicle registration, or landing permits.</p>   |
| Logistics and delivery               | <p><b>How are organisational assets managed? How is assistance handed over? Who is involved in aid provision?</b></p> <p>Example: Food aid and assets can be diverted from intended beneficiaries if proper communication and accountability mechanisms are not set up. Communities are often able to hold their leaders to account if they are informed (and agree with) aid provision plans.</p>  |

#### iv Adapting programmes to be conflict-sensitive

**At every phase of the programme, if potential negative impacts are identified – or potential opportunities for positive impacts – this should lead to changes in the programme. These adaptations can be supported and informed by:**

- **Feedback loops:** Agencies should solicit feedback from beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. This can be hard to achieve in the volatility of South Sudan but is worth exploring.
- **Updated conflict analysis:** This should be updated continually, whether through formal or informal processes, and shared across the organisation. This is particularly important in a context of high staff turnover like South Sudan.
- **Flexible approach to programming and budgeting:** A rigid focus on pre-determined logframes or outputs reduces a programme's ability to adapt to changing circumstances or new analysis. Agencies need to be able to shift targets, outputs or outcomes as the South Sudan context evolves. This needs to include mechanisms and processes for budget and spending flexibility.
- **Flexible approach to contracting:** An over-emphasis on burn rate or deadlines can disincentivise implementing partners from making shifts in programming as this can entail delays and reduced activities for a period while the implementing partner shifts course. This has been a challenge in South Sudan where large contracts and grants are implemented.
- **Emphasis on learning and flexibility:** Agencies must evaluate not only programme delivery, impact and value for money, but also contributions to joint learning. It can be hard to make time for this in the pressurised South Sudan context. Therefore, human and financial resources should be devoted to this goal, and it should be included in planning and evaluations.

| Programme   | Potentially causing harm by...  | Potential programme adaptation  |
|---|---|---|
| Provision of health services in government-controlled areas   | ...creating perception of siding with the government                                  | Try to provide services in rebel-held areas too   |
| Non-Beneficiaries say that food aid is decreasing riverine trade between two communities  | ...reducing intercommunal interdependence and undermining livelihoods                 | Explore ways to reinforce the trade linkages (and peaceful coexistence).  |
| A WASH programme plans to provide hand pumps in an area where tensions are rising over land rights                                      | ...increasing competition and potential for conflict over control of land             | Halt implementation until a solution can be agreed, potentially changing nature of programme.   |
| A non-food item (NFI) distribution programme receives information supplies are being diverted by an armed group and sold in the market. | ...providing an armed group with financial resources to aid their struggle.           | Explore ways to make the goods less useful in a marketplace, through creative marking or otherwise compromising retail value without affecting use. |
| A primary education programme has poor student retention as children are seasonally sent to cattle camps.                               | ... unequal access to education for pastoralists that deepens other conflict drivers. | Redirect the programme so that it also invests in mobile education and outreach to pastoralists.  |

#### iv Monitoring and evaluating conflict sensitivity

**Conflict sensitivity should be integrated into existing M&E methodologies and systems rather than creating new ones. This will avoid creating additional work and the risk that a conflict sensitivity assessment is side-lined when time or resource pressure is high. The table below identifies key questions and approaches that can be adopted to support the effective integration of conflict sensitivity into M&E systems.**

| Questions for framing monitoring and evaluation  | What this means for monitoring and evaluation frameworks and processes  |
|--|---|
| <p>What is the programme trying to achieve from a conflict sensitivity perspective (where is it on the 'spectrum of ambition' for conflict-sensitivity)?</p> | <p>Example indicators for monitoring and evaluation :</p> <p>'Minimising harm': New water points do not contribute to increased conflicts between neighbouring communities</p> <p>'Contributing to peace and stability': New water points contribute to strengthening peaceful coexistence between communities.</p> <p>'Directly addressing conflict drivers': New water points and community reconciliation processes assist communities in strengthening local conflict resolution mechanisms.</p>  |
| <p>Who will the programme need to get feedback from in order to understand what intended and unintended impacts it is having?</p>                            | <p>Ideally, from beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (inclusive of gender, age, ethnicity) – those most directly affected by both the conflict/s and the aid; and from implementing partners. Note however, that in a context like South Sudan with significant aid investments, people have spent a lot of time being interviewed without seeing much benefit in return (from their perspectives). So consider joint evaluations, connecting interviews to other project activities that provide benefits etc.</p>   |
| <p>How should M&amp;E be conducted to be conflict-sensitive?</p>   | <p>Think about:</p> <p>Safety: of interviewees and interviewers / researchers, taking into account particular gender- and ethnicity- related vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Targeting: men / women, old / young, different ethnicities etc will all have different experiences and roles in conflict and peace.</p> <p>Timing: interviews in dry or wet season could mean certain conflicts flare up / calm down, influencing responses; people may also be busy with specific activities (e.g. young men may be moving to other pastures with cattle; women may be planting crops), influencing who is available to interview / what time of day is least disruptive.</p> |
| <p>Will feedback be provided to beneficiaries? If so, how?</p>   | <p>This could be a powerful way to demonstrate accountability and that people are being listened to in a context where leaders are in many respects unaccountable to the population. However, also think about sensitivities e.g. about apportioning blame for violence or conflict-fuelling behaviour to particular groups. Or find way to use the feedback as part of broader reconciliation / conflict resolution processes.</p>   |

### Another word on indicators and M&E processes

Indicators for monitoring and evaluating conflict sensitivity can be captured in different ways – some are suggested above. Indicators always need to be context specific, and can be framed around:

- Specific conflict sensitivity risks to be monitored: e.g. “Aid provided to IDPs does not lead to increased conflict with host communities”
- Objectives the programme wants to achieve: e.g. “The implementing partner builds positive relationships with communities and authorities in both government- and rebel-controlled areas in order to deliver health services”
- Risk to the programme (captured in risk frameworks), e.g. “The implementing partner is seen as colluding with the government by travelling with SPLA convoys.”
- Include processes to ensure meaningful feedback loops are established, allowing for regular communication with, and capturing and sharing of lessons with local communities.

### Reflection and learning

At the mid-term or end points of a programme, conflict sensitivity should be assessed by using the indicators mentioned above, but also by encouraging reflection and learning. Conflict-sensitive practice is challenging and there are no easy answers to dilemmas such as those international agencies face in South Sudan. Having a safe space in which to raise concerns, test approaches, admit failures and identify successes is crucial to improving the conflict sensitivity of engagements. These can be particularly effective when bringing people together from different types of organisations: donors, implementing partners, UN, and community groups.

Reflection could be built into specific points in the implementation of the interventions, for instance:

- Programme planning or review meetings
- Team or all-of-office meetings
- Special ‘brown-bag lunches’ or regular out-of-office reflection sessions
- Asking a staff member to be the ‘learning focal point’ – and rotate the role – with a clear briefing on collecting specific categories of insights quarterly and sharing with the rest of the team / office. This can be done verbally or by having a ‘learning box’ into which people drop their thoughts as they come up, for the learning focal point to collate and clarify.

#### NOTES

- 9 Please note that these are broad examples – indicators will always be context-specific and the examples provided here should not be used as blue prints.

# 3

## Conflict sensitivity resources

Conflict Sensitivity Consortium (CSC) (2012). How to guide to conflict sensitivity.

Conflict Sensitivity Consortium (2012) Promoting conflict sensitivity amongst donor agencies

APFO, CECORE, CHA, FEWER, International Alert, Saferworld. (2004). Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: Resource Pack.

CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (2016), Designing Strategic Initiatives to Impact Conflict Systems: Systems Approaches to Peacebuilding. A Resource Manual. Cambridge, MA.

CDA, "Do No Harm Project: Trainer's Manual. Background and history of the DNH project"

Haider, H., (2014). Conflict Sensitivity: Topic Guide, GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

UK Stabilisation Unit (2016), "Conflict sensitivity tools and guidance",

The Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) provides research, analysis, technical guidance and training that supports joint understanding of the operational context in South Sudan as a basis for conflict-sensitive programming, decision-making and strategising. The CSRF is funded by the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Canada, and implemented by Saferworld, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects and swisspeace.

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