

# CSRF

Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility

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## Making or Breaking Silos? Resilience programming in South Sudan

November 2021

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## Acronyms

BRACE	Building Resilience through Asset Creation and Enhancement
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK)
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IDPs	Internally Displaced People
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
N/LNGO	National/Local Non-governmental Organisation
PAs	Partnership Areas
PoCs	Protection of Civilians sites
PfRR	Partnership for Recovery and Resilience
R-ARCSS	Revitalised Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
REN	Resilience Exchange Network
RSRTF	South Sudan Reconciliation, Stabilization, Resilience Trust Fund
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

## Executive Summary

Resilience has been a commonly used concept among development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding actors in South Sudan for some years and putting it into practice has become increasingly relevant in the current context. There are a variety of ways in which resilience is interpreted and practiced in South Sudan. This can impact on coordination and learning efforts among donors and aid agencies, as well as dynamics within coordination fora, and conflict dynamics among South Sudanese communities. This paper highlights the existence of silos in resilience programming and coordination mechanisms, and analyses how these impact on achieving outcomes. It then identifies and assesses conflict sensitivity opportunities and risks related to resilience programming and coordination. Looking at practical examples of resilience programming and coordination in South Sudan, such as the Partnership for Resilience and Recovery (PfRR), the South Sudan Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience Trust Fund (RSRTF), and the Resilience Exchange Network (REN), it outlines approaches and practices that could be replicated and should be strengthened.<sup>1</sup>

This paper is based on desk research and interviews with 14 key informants. The research included a desk-based review of relevant literature, focusing on definitions of resilience, and resilience-focused programming and coordination; triple nexus approaches to resilience; the challenges and opportunities to these approaches; gender and communities; and conflict sensitivity within the resilience context. Secondary sources consulted included articles on and websites about resilience, triple nexus and the resilience coordination and programming bodies. This literature review exercise helped us to understand the background of key areas identified above for our study. Resources consulted on the triple nexus approach helped us understand the opportunities and challenges inherent in the push for closer collaboration between humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors, which resilience coordination and programming bodies could take advantage of or learn from.

The findings show that the different conceptions of resilience among donors and aid actors do not significantly affect resilience programming in South Sudan, although it can result in tensions among donors and aid agencies implementing resilience coordination and programming initiatives. These tensions can impede collaborative approaches to resilience and re-enforce the tendency for donors and international and national aid actors to continue using siloed funding or programming approaches.

Communities across South Sudan do not experience shocks uniformly, and as a result, have developed coping mechanisms that reflect their locality, including economic activity, climatic conditions, conflict dynamics and other factors prevalent in areas where they live. Shocks also affect women and girls and men and boys differently; using a gender lens to understand how women/girls and men/boys contribute to community resilience is therefore critical. Understanding the contexts of these shocks and stresses, coping mechanisms and how each gender group is affected and contributes to their communities' resilience is key to meaningful resilience interventions.

Conflict is a significant and recurring shock in South Sudan. Resilience coordination and programming initiatives can easily and unintentionally exacerbate tensions, if they are designed and implemented without considering their impact on conflict dynamics at the local, sub-national and national levels. There is greater awareness among both donors and aid agencies on how their activities can cause tensions among communities they operate in, and resilience coordination mechanisms should build on this awareness to ensure that resilience programmes are conflict sensitive and contributing to peace in South Sudan.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper focuses on how silos within resilience programming and coordination mechanisms can affect the effectiveness of resilience programming. It does not explicitly look at the conflict sensitivity of resilience programming, the impact of shocks on South Sudanese or their implications for marginalised groups.

## Recommendations

1. **Conflict sensitivity and gender considerations should be seen as fundamental to designing and developing effective and integrated resilience programming and coordination mechanisms.** To deepen understanding of how conflict dynamics and gender norms impact on resilience in complex and context-specific ways, gender-sensitive conflict analysis should be conducted prior to designing a programme and be updated on an ongoing basis. This will help to maximise the positive roles played by both women and men in building resilient communities and to avoid inadvertently exacerbating local tensions or undermining local resilience initiatives or networks. There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach appropriate for South Sudan. Focusing solely on men or women risks undermining the limited gains that have been made on gender equality in South Sudan and misunderstanding the complementary roles that both can play in building resilient communities. Furthermore, recognising the roles that women *and* men play in building resiliency can also provide the foundation for longer-term peacebuilding work, which is critical to addressing the underlying drivers of conflict and its resulting shocks and transforming harmful gender norms.<sup>2</sup>
2. **Be more proactive in adopting bottom-up and context-specific resilience coordination and programming approaches.** Defining ‘resilience’ is context- and community-specific. South Sudanese communities’, as well as local authorities’, understanding of resilience and the factors they consider important for resilience may not necessarily be the same ones that the donors or aid agencies would focus on. This does not mean that all resilience strategies are positive, however, as some can be predicated on actions taken by more powerful or influential individuals and communities, often to the detriment of less powerful or marginalised individuals or communities, further fuelling marginalisation, insecurity, and conflict.
3. **Increase the involvement of South Sudanese expertise in the design and implementation of resilience programmes, and only bring in international experts to complement, not replace, this expertise.** Not only are South Sudanese researchers and N/LNGOs often more familiar with the coping and resilience strategies used by communities and households, but national staff working for INGOs, and donors are also often overlooked as sources of expertise. Aid actors should be more willing to sensitively engage with South Sudanese academics, N/LNGOs and national staff on how their families and communities cope with crisis, build resilience, and what strategies have contributed to peace or created tension and conflict. More proactively reaching out to South Sudanese could also create better links between local communities, INGOs and donors, and increase both the acceptance and effectiveness of resilience programmes.
4. **Capitalise on and learn from efforts, such as the PfRR and RSRTF, to inform area-based approaches to bring together actors and strengthen co-ordination across development, peacebuilding, and humanitarian actors.** There is increased interest in an area-based approach to management and decision-making across donors, UN agencies, INGOs and N/LNGOs. This provides humanitarian coordination mechanisms with the opportunity to learn from what has worked, and what has not, within the PfRR and RSRTF, as well as help aid actors to engage with local organisations more actively, as many do not have offices in Juba. This will benefit not only humanitarian response and resilience programming but contribute to ongoing efforts to operationalise the triple nexus approach.
5. **Ensure that coordination mechanisms that seek to bring together development, peacebuilding and humanitarian actors are properly resourced and supported.** While coordination can improve the effectiveness and conflict sensitivity of resilience programming, it also comes with financial,

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<sup>2</sup> See Saferworld’s facilitation guide ‘[Gender-sensitive conflict analysis](#)’, which primarily targets peacebuilders, as well as the CARE/IASC GenCap/Oxfam report ‘[From the Ground Up: Gender and Conflict Analysis in Yemen](#)’ which looks at gender and conflict in a humanitarian setting.

time and opportunity costs for both agencies and individual staff members. The RSRTF and the PfRR, both of which are active, have the necessary financial and human resources, as well as the clear mandate, needed to function. On the other hand, the REN and the Peace Actors Network were more informal mechanisms, reliant on the ability of their members to ‘carve out’ the time and resources needed to function, and the research struggled to find evidence that either network is functioning and active.

6. **NGOs should revitalise the Resilience Exchange Network, hosted by the NGO Forum, and ensure there is a balance in its Technical Working Group between INGOs and N/LNGOs.** The REN was a good initiative by the NGO community and has the potential to be an active NGO-focused learning space to inform the broader aid community’s thinking on both resilience and the triple nexus. However, the group has been inactive since the launching of the PfRR. Revitalising this space and having an explicit outreach to N/LNGOs to learn from them would both recognise the valuable insights that N/LNGOs have on resilience programming and turn the traditional international/national aid community relationship on its head, thereby contributing to the broader ‘Grand Bargain’ agenda of challenging power dynamics within the aid sector.
7. **Learn from, and about, positive local coping mechanisms and strategies that South Sudanese communities and households have used and are using now and build upon them to support longer term resilience.** The resiliency of South Sudanese households and communities should not be underestimated. South Sudanese men, women, boys, and girls have withstood decades of violence and civil war, and in so doing, developed coping strategies that have allowed them to survive, and in some instances thrive. Key to this learning will be listening to locally based organisations and having them advise international agencies, rather than the other way around.

## Introduction

Over the last decade the concept of resilience, broadly defined as ‘the ability to withstand shocks and stresses while maintaining core function’<sup>3</sup>, has been embraced by humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors in South Sudan. Seen as a means of addressing the long-term vulnerabilities in societies and communities that affect their ability to manage crises and challenges<sup>4</sup>, building resilience is particularly important in South Sudan, given the recurring and compounding shocks that many South Sudanese continue to experience.<sup>5</sup>

This paper looks at the evolution of resilience programming in South Sudan before assessing the varying ways resilience is interpreted and practiced in South Sudan and the extent to which these differences effect coordination and learning efforts among and between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors, and their potential impact on conflict dynamics. Drawing on desk-based research undertaken by CSRFB<sup>6</sup>, as well as feedback from 14 international and South Sudanese key informants working with donors or operational agencies, this research focused on three key areas: how is resilience is defined by donors and agencies in the South Sudan context; what a resilient community might look like from a gendered perspective; and if current resilience programmes and coordination mechanisms are supporting a conflict-sensitive approach to strengthening resilience in South Sudan.

The shift away from purely humanitarian to longer-term resilience and development programming has led to increasing efforts to coordinate around the concept, resulting in programmes such as the UK-funded *Building Resilience through Asset Creation and Enhancement* (BRACE I, 2013-2015, and BRACE II, 2015-2023) and *Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience in South Sudan (HARISS, 2015-2021)*. Multi-donor programmes, such as the *Partnership for Resilience and Recovery* (PfRR) and the *Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience Trust Fund* (RSRTF), as well as the establishment of the Resilience Exchange Network (REN) by members of the NGO Forum, are indications of the increased interest in and uptake of approaches to build resilience within the South Sudan aid sector. Such resilience-focused initiatives present opportunities to break down silos between programming focus areas and have the potential to promote integrated approaches, like what is currently envisaged by the triple nexus approach (intersection of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding programming), and thereby improve the coordination and effectiveness of resilience-focused programming in South Sudan.

Humanitarian-, development- and peacebuilding-focused agencies in South Sudan, and more widely, have developed their own definitions and understandings of what is meant by the term ‘resilience’. This could potentially complicate efforts to coordinate and partner effectively and strategically. Such gaps present conflict sensitivity issues and may inadvertently cause tension, particularly in areas affected by insecurity, conflict, and violence that require coordinated responses to be effective and to not undermine longer-term peacebuilding efforts.

From a conflict sensitivity perspective, well-planned and coordinated resilience programming in South Sudan could help ensure that programmes do not weaken existing community capacities and mechanisms to address shared challenges and resolve their differences peacefully, and instead build

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<sup>3</sup> Clark-Ginsberga A, McCaul B, Bremaud I, Caceres G, Mpanje D, Patel, S, Patel, R (2020), ‘[Practitioner approaches to measuring community resilience: The analysis of the resilience of communities to disasters toolkit](#)’, International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, **50** (November 2020), 101714, p 1.

<sup>4</sup> Levine S (2014), ‘[Political flag or conceptual umbrella? Why progress on resilience must be freed from the constraints of technical arguments](#)’, Overseas Development Institute, Humanitarian Policy Group, Policy Brief 60, July.

<sup>5</sup> [Saferworld South Sudan](#) has a number of good reports and briefings available on peacebuilding and resilience in South Sudan, while [swisspeace](#) has a research project ‘From Fragility to Resilience’ which focused on Eritrea, South Sudan, Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire.

<sup>6</sup> More than 30 papers, articles and blogs were consulted and reviewed as part of the literature review to inform this research.

on these capacities. A conflict-sensitive approach can also ensure that programmes consider patterns of social and economic competition and marginalisation, major drivers of conflict in South Sudan, as well as support the peaceful (re)integration of returning internally displaced persons (IDPs)/refugees and former combatants into local social and economic structures, thereby discouraging a return to violence.

## The evolution of resilience programming in South Sudan

Resilience-focused research and programmes have been implemented in South Sudan for over a decade and have focused on a variety of sectors, such as the World Bank report on education resilience in 2012.<sup>7</sup> Over time, resilience as a concept and programming approach has gained further traction among development, humanitarian and peacebuilding actors in South Sudan illustrated by programmes such as: the UK-funded *Building Resilience through Asset Creation and Enhancement* (BRACE I, 2013-2015, and BRACE II, 2015-2023); the *Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience in South Sudan (HARISS, 2015-2021)* and; the USAID-funded *Resilience and Food Security Programme* focused on Greater Jonglei (RFSP 2017-2020).<sup>8</sup>

Momentum increased in 2018 in the run up to the signing of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), based partly on the anticipated shift towards longer-term development work and in recognition that resilience programming would help make people less vulnerable to the impact of conflict. Building on earlier resilience efforts and past programmes, the RSRTF, PfRR and REN were all established during this period or shortly after. Resilience has also been explicitly mentioned in the South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan 2021 and organisational strategies, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in South Sudan’s Resilience Strategy, 2019-2021<sup>9</sup> and USAID’s strategic framework for South Sudan 2020-2024.<sup>10</sup>

The majority of South Sudanese continue to face risks, such as flooding, violence and hunger and the country is yet to emerge from the conflict that broke out in 2013 and again in 2016, despite the signing of the R-ARCSS. The protracted vacuum in political leadership at

**BRACE II** (Building Resilience through Asset Creation and Enhancement), illustrates the evolution of resilience programming over the last decade. Based on a three-year pilot (BRACE I, 2013-2015), it was initially planned as a five-year project (2015 -2020) and has been extended to 2023. The project seeks to “improve food security and resilience, primarily through reducing vulnerability to climate variability and extremes. It also aims to reduce vulnerability to communal conflict by increasing social solidarity and cohesion.”

There are three components, two implemented by FAO and the third by a World Vision-led NGO consortium that includes Smile Again Africa Development Organization and Support for Peace and Education Development Programme. Using a ‘Cash/Food for Assets’ approach, vulnerable households receive cash or food assistance in return for their work on creating or rehabilitating community assets, such as anti-flooding dykes, clearing new farmland, water ponds, etc. Communities decide together which assets they would like to focus on, and then work together to build or improve them, contributing to overall community cohesion. The project has double benefits: cash/food assistance immediately relieves food insecurity, while the community assets component makes households less vulnerable to climate shocks and improves food production. Other activities include improving agricultural practices and providing inputs, as well as increasing skills and awareness in other key areas.

Source: [DFID Business Case and Summary \(October 2018\)](#), and [Addendum, to Business Case \(March 2020\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> World Bank (2013), ‘[South Sudan: Education Resilience Case Report](#)’, World Bank: Washington, D.C.

<sup>8</sup> RFSP is a follow-on project from the Jonglei Food Security Program (JFSP), which ran from 2011 to 2017.

<sup>9</sup> FAO (2019), ‘[South Sudan Resilience Strategy 2019-2021: Working across the humanitarian-peace-development nexus for resilience and food security](#)’, September.

<sup>10</sup> USAID (2020), ‘[South Sudan Strategic Framework, July 31, 2020 - July 31, 2024](#)’, USAID: Washington, D.C.



the county and state level also enabled escalating violence, undermined resilience building, and led to an upsurge in local impunity. Widespread grassroots, localised, and sub-national violence continues to affect communities across South Sudan. Coupled with the outbreak of COVID-19 and the related donor cuts in foreign aid budgets, building the resiliency of South Sudanese to recover from shocks is becoming increasingly urgent.

## What does resilience mean?

One of the opportunities, but also a significant challenge, of the concept of resilience is that there is no commonly accepted definition.<sup>11</sup> According to FAO, resilience is: “the ability to prevent disasters and crises as well as to anticipate, absorb, accommodate or recover from them in a timely, efficient and sustainable manner.”<sup>12</sup> The PfRR<sup>13</sup> defines resilience as “the ability to withstand a wide range of shocks including, but not limited to, political upheavals, national and local level conflict, displacement, food insecurity, disease outbreaks, drought, other natural disasters and adverse events that can increase vulnerability.”<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offers a more transformative definition, as a process “of strengthening the capacity of people, communities and countries to anticipate, manage, recover and transform from shocks”<sup>15</sup>. Here, the impetus of resilience is not simply about preparing for and coping with challenges but also to support of progressive and positive change. Definitions among those interviewed, particularly N/LNGOs, had similar themes: “the ability to absorb shocks, bounce back and emerge stronger”,<sup>16</sup> “empowering the community to deal with shocks, which includes the ability to predict and absorb shocks”<sup>17</sup>, To illustrate resilience in practice, respondents cited the examples of an individual who is able to regain his livelihood after losing his livestock<sup>18</sup>, or an individual or community coping with economic crisis, the loss of assets, and the lack of services.<sup>19</sup>

From a peacebuilding perspective, resilience has been defined as the “capacity of individuals, communities and society as a whole to address and change the conditions and structures that lead to

### Resilience Principles?

**Accept** that resilience is dynamic and multi-faceted and commit to integrating resilience work across sectors and disciplines.

**Recognise** that communities and households are key actors in their own future, and focus on processes, as well as outcomes, even for humanitarian programming.

**See** the response to a shock or stress as an opportunity to strengthen or build the capacities of affected communities, households, or individuals, particularly women and women-headed households.

**Acknowledge** that even during a crisis, factors other than the physical needs of individuals or households, such as social networks, are central to the resilience of affected communities.

**Recognise** that a community’s, household’s, or individual’s resilience may come at the expense of, or negatively impact on, another’s resilience.

*Adapted from:* Tanner V (2014), ‘[Resilience: Development Fad or Concept with Staying Power?](#)’, DAI, September.

<sup>11</sup> Tanner T, Bahadur A, Moench M (2017), ‘[Challenges for resilience policy and practice](#)’, Overseas Development Institute, Working Paper 519, August, p 7.

<sup>12</sup> FAO op. cit. ‘[South Sudan Resilience Strategy 2019-2021: Working across the humanitarian-peace-development nexus for resilience and food security](#)’, p 1.

<sup>13</sup> The [Partnership for Recovery and Resilience](#) is a collective of donors and NGOs dedicated to enhancing resilience in South Sudan.

<sup>14</sup> See the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience [pillars](#).

<sup>15</sup> UNDP, 2013, Position paper: A resilience-based development response to the Syria crisis, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> CSRF Interview 2, 15 Jan 2021, male

<sup>17</sup> CSRF Interview 1, 15 Jan 2021, male

<sup>18</sup> CSRF Interview 2, 15 Jan 2021, male

<sup>19</sup> CSRF Interview 3, 15 December 2020, male

violent conflict”<sup>20</sup>. As noted by Anupah Makoond, this definition “in addition to enriching peacebuilding processes in and of itself, contribute[s] to the much-needed linkages between humanitarian interventions with longer term peacebuilding processes.”<sup>21</sup> A respondent who works for a peacebuilding organisation defined resilience as “empowering the community to deal with shocks, which includes the ability to predict and absorb shocks”<sup>22</sup>. In the context of peacebuilding (and arguably more widely), it should be acknowledged that resilience is not always positive and ‘negative’ resilience is embodied by resistance to change that leaves communities vulnerable to renewed threats and violence and potentially promotes business as usual.<sup>23</sup> Positive resilience enables communities to “embark on trust-building and confidence-building measures, address war grievances fairly, and...have the vision to build new patterns of local governance and representation”.<sup>24</sup> To ensure resilience programming is conflict sensitive, care must be taken to ensure that there it is based on a deep, contextual knowledge of resilience because “local resilience is dynamic and prone to sudden shifts. In consequence, it must be monitored constantly, instead of being taken as a snapshot every five years.”<sup>25</sup>

The lack of a specific, coherent definition of resilience can lead to debates about the merits and disadvantages of using clear, varied, or vague definitions to inform practice. An ambiguous definition is not always negative, as it can encourage communication and discussions between different actors and allow different agencies to collaborate by identifying common ground or purpose among the various groups.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, broad definitions can enable resilience actors to work towards their stated purposes and mandates, while collaborating to implement their individual humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding interventions. For instance, it allows the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) to fulfil its mandate of playing a convening role and bridging the gap between resilience actors.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, using varying definitions help unite different actors and institutions.<sup>28</sup> This implies that if agencies agree to work together, communicate, and share information and learnings, despite different interpretations of the concept of resilience, it could allow them to focus on achieving a common goal.

**Peace and Conflict Factors Affecting Resilience**

The degree to which resilience *strengthens or undermines social cohesion*

Whether forms of resilience *draw on or compromise responsive leadership, good governance, and inclusive politics*

The degree to which resilience *fosters or inhibits access to economic resources and opportunities*

Whether capacities for resilience are a *source of learning or of entrenching past conflict legacies*

Whether resilience is *supported or undermined by societal information and communication networks*

The degree to which resilience *contributes to or undermines systems of law and positive perceptions of justice and safety*

Source: OECD (2014), [Resilience Systems Analysis](#)

<sup>20</sup> Makoond A (2015), ‘[Does resilience enrich peacebuilding?](#)’, Interpeace, June.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> CSRF Interview 1, 15 January 2021, male

<sup>23</sup> Van Metre L and Calder J (2016), ‘[Peacebuilding and Resilience: How Society Responds to Violence](#)’, US Institute of Peace, No 121, October.

<sup>24</sup> Makoond A (2015), ‘[Does resilience enrich peacebuilding?](#)’, Interpeace, June.

<sup>25</sup> Menkhau K (2013), ‘[Making Sense of Resilience in Peacebuilding Contexts: Approaches, Applications, Implications](#)’, Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, Paper No. 6, p 6.

<sup>26</sup> Kimber LR (2019), ‘[Resilience from the United Nations Standpoint: The Challenges of “Vagueness”](#)’, in: S Wiig, B Fahlbruch (eds.), *Exploring Resilience* (SpringerBriefs in Applied Sciences and Technology – Safety Management), p 92; Tanner T, op. cit., p 7.

<sup>27</sup> Kimber, op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> Tanner T, op. cit, p 7.

However, the lack of a common understanding of the concept of resilience can also make it hard for resilience actors to jointly plan and operationalise interventions to address a crisis if they are unwilling to embrace definitions used by other agencies or actors, or agree common principles.<sup>29</sup> The different approaches to resilience-building have, for example led to disputes between humanitarian actors and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) around the Protection of Civilians Sites (PoCs) over whether to provide humanitarian and resilience-related assistance to the IDPs or not, with the former focusing on long-term capacity-building, while UNMISS' focused on short-term humanitarian assistance.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the vague definition of resilience rendered the UNISDR's disaster resilience programming difficult to implement owing to its humanitarian mandate of preventing immediate harm to individuals.<sup>31</sup>

The fluid definition of resilience across sectors and actors represents both an opportunity, as well as a challenge to aid actors. On the one hand, 'resilience' can be used to cover a wide range of approaches, allowing for more flexibility and adaptability when designing programmes, especially those based on communities' own experiences/priorities. On the other hand, by pulling in different directions it can make co-ordination difficult and runs the risk of resilience becoming a meaningless concept that is 'everything to everyone'. Furthermore, if donors and aid agencies look at resilience programming mainly through the lens of livelihoods (or indeed the lens of other specific issues, including conflict), rather than holistically considering all factors that both contribute to or undermine resilience, it may confine them to working in siloes, thereby missing opportunities to build social cohesion or coordinate with other sectors or peacebuilding efforts.

For N/LNGOs, their definitions of resilience were much broader and encompassed many of the concepts in the more detailed definitions above, while forgoing the wordsmithing that is often a hallmark of international definitions. Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of their definitions is that they are more reflective of both South Sudanese's own experiences, as well as N/LNGOs' need to use a more holistic approach to their programming, due their need to manage the uncertainties around funding availability, and the priorities of their own communities in South Sudan. As noted by one male N/LNGO respondent, "[r]esilience is the capacity or flexibility to recover from difficulties".<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, a woman working for a women-focused N/LNGO provided an interesting gendered definition that reflects how women and men have experienced both conflict **and** gender norms in South Sudan, "...on the side of females, resilience may be considered being able to be strong enough to speak out without shame, while on the male perspective it is associated with tolerance, for instance [the] ability to accept any misfortune that may have happened to them or member of the family and accept that it did happen without thinking of revenge."<sup>33</sup>

## Why is resilience important in South Sudan?

In South Sudan individuals and communities experience, and try to recover from, numerous and often compounding shocks and stresses, including trauma, conflict and violence, climate-induced hazards, economic hardships, political volatility, and disease outbreaks. Resilience programmes in South Sudan have focused on both community initiatives and on individuals and households. Some, such as the UK-funded BRACE II programme sought to build both. However, it is important to recognise that resilience in South Sudan is often community, rather than individually, based and is linked to kinship and other social support networks that individuals and households can draw on in times of crisis.<sup>34</sup> It

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Munive J (2021), '[Resilience in Displacement and the Protection of Civilians in South Sudan](#)', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **34** (2), June, pp 1879–1899.

<sup>31</sup> Kimber, op. cit., p 93

<sup>32</sup> CSRF interview, 27 January 2021, male.

<sup>33</sup> CSRF email interview, 19 April 2021, female.

<sup>34</sup> Santschi M, Gworo R, White E (2018), '[Caught between Two Cultures: When aid in South Sudan is pulled between local norms and western systems](#)', Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF).

must not only take into consideration the complex gender dynamics at play and the different ways that men and women are affected by shocks, but also how initiatives that seek to build or provide assets can also make communities or individuals more vulnerable to asset stripping or destruction during targeted attacks, emphasising the need for a conflict-sensitive approach.

### Community resilience

In South Sudan kinship-based and other social networks are a critical component of local coping and social protection systems, with support during crises to kin-related by blood or marriage seen as an obligation governed by social norms.<sup>35</sup> As a result, the resilience of a community is symbiotically linked to the resilience of individuals and households. Globally, some common elements of ‘community resilience’ have been identified, including local knowledge, community networks and relationships, communication, health, good governance and leadership, resources, economic investment, preparedness and mental outlook.<sup>36</sup> Increasingly, resilience is also seen in terms of different kinds of capacity within communities, namely “absorptive” capacity (the ability to withstand a shock and recover); “adaptive” capacity (the ability to adapt to a changing environment); and “transformative” capacity (the ability to proactively shape the environment).<sup>37</sup>

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**“The resilience of communities in South Sudan has declined since conflict broke out in late 2013. Repeated bouts of violence and economic shocks have aggravated a spiralling food security situation and impacted on households’ coping capacities and livelihoods.”**

*FAO South Sudan Resilience Strategy, 2019-2021*

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According to interview respondents, several factors can help a person or group to deal with difficulties or shocks and stresses in South Sudan. These include having reliable jobs, access to basic services, including mental health, ownership and use of land and access to security and justice.<sup>38</sup> Other factors mentioned include not only controlling assets but also managing them, which is particularly relevant for women.<sup>39</sup> The ability to absorb, adapt and/or transform as a result of shocks or stresses is determined by an individual’s or community’ particular circumstances – be it related to flooding, poor infrastructure or road networks, limited markets or basic services, or regularly experiencing conflict. For example, communities in Aweil were viewed as having a high level of resilience due to a number of factors: their proximity to the South Sudan/Sudan border, due to the Malual-Dinka trade with the Misseriya and Baggara of Sudan, and during times of hunger in areas bordering Sudan, being able to buy food, such as sorghum from their neighbours, or temporarily migrate to work on farms across the border.<sup>40</sup> However, this can also make communities or households more vulnerable, particularly if their coping strategy or resilience is predicated on their being able to cross the border to access markets or work.

One South Sudanese respondent suggested that pastoral and agro-pastoral communities are more resilient than agricultural or urban communities.<sup>41</sup> Whether this is true or not would probably be debated by individuals who come from either agricultural or urban communities. What it does

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<sup>35</sup> Humphrey A, Krishnan V, Krystalli R (2019), [‘The Currency of Connections: Why local support systems are integral to helping people recover in South Sudan’](#), Mercy Corps, January.

<sup>36</sup> Twigg J, Calderone M (2019), [‘Building livelihood and community resilience: Lessons from Somalia and Zimbabwe’](#), ODI and CESVI, January, p 6.

<sup>37</sup> Maxwell D, Stites E, Robillard SC, Wagner M (2017), [‘Conflict and Resilience: A Synthesis of Feinstein International Center Work on Building Resilience and Protecting Livelihoods in Conflict-Related Crises’](#), Feinstein International Center, Tufts University.

<sup>38</sup> CSRF Interview 1, 15 December 2020, male.

<sup>39</sup> CSRF Interview 2, 15 January 2021, male.

<sup>40</sup> CSRF Interview 1, 15 January 2021, male

<sup>41</sup> CSRF Interview, 21 April 2021, male.

highlight, however, is that an individual’s perceptions of resilience, be they South Sudanese or non-South Sudanese, are shaped by their own experiences and bias. This only re-enforces the importance of resilience programmes being contextually adapted to reflect and respond to how different South Sudanese communities have defined resilience and their resulting practices and strategies. Those agencies who have more experience working with pastoral communities and their coping mechanisms, for example, may not be familiar with how farmers in other parts of South Sudan withstand shocks. Similarly, an agency with a history of working with agricultural communities will have a better understanding of how they cope with shocks. That perceptions of resilience are based on an individual’s experience highlights how it “springs primarily from the strength of internal social capital, trust networks, and leadership”.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, it is important that any resilience programming considers and is sensitive to this in order not to undermine resilience networks by inadvertently supporting only one aspect at the expense of another part of the puzzle.

Given the collectivist nature of society in South Sudan, the role that social networks play in creating resilience cannot be underestimated. In times of crises, most people rely on each other (families, in-laws, and neighbours), trying to ensure that their whole community remains resilient to any shock and stress that affect them. On the other hand, support to individuals and households in conflict contexts can leave them vulnerable to asset stripping, as they can often be targeted for their land/possessions/(small) capital, which can then undermine their resilience, rather than building it.<sup>43</sup>

**Context-Specific Resilience**

A female farmer in Yei who has lost all her crops because of the conflict, flees to Uganda. After returning to South Sudan, she draws on her social network to finance the purchase of seeds and tools. In a few months, she has a bumper harvest, can repay her loans and cover school fees for her children.

A male cattle keeper in Nyal has access to the swamps and moves his cattle there when he hears that rival groups are planning to raid his cattle. His access to the swamps provides both a ‘safe harbour’ for his livestock and provides access to dry season water and grazing.

**Gender and resilience**

The concept of community resilience applies to every member of a community. However, gender and gender norms in South Sudan are complex and women, men, girls and boys experience shocks and stresses differently, which also shapes their respective access to, and choice of, coping strategies.<sup>44</sup> Gender norms in South Sudanese society consider men as the key providers for and protectors of their families and communities, and, by extension, the primary decision-makers in the household and public spaces. South Sudanese women are mainly seen as the caregivers, whose decision-making is limited to domestic issues. This can leave them with little control over financial or other resources and few opportunities to participate in public decision-making. While these norms are slowly changing, in rural areas, they are often followed by both men and women.

Women’s adherence to gender norms, including harmful norms that drive and perpetuate marginalisation, insecurity, and violence, and their associated responsibilities, often means that that they are expected to fulfil their roles, regardless of whether there is a crisis affecting their household or the larger community. For instance, women and girls generally remain in the homesteads, and if flooding affects their community, they not only face the risk that it poses to themselves, their homes and household assets, but are also expected to cook meals, fetch water and care for children, regardless of the physical circumstances or health and security dangers. In the case of men and boys, however, flooding may pose less of a physical risk, as they can be more mobile and either leave to seek suitable land for their households to move to or migrate with livestock to higher ground as

<sup>42</sup> Menkhaus K (2013), op. cit., p 2.

<sup>43</sup> Maxwell D, et. al., op cit.

<sup>44</sup> Avis W (2020), [‘Coping Mechanism in South Sudan in relation to Different Types of Shock’](#), K4D Helpdesk Report 801, April.

needed. During conflict women are often at greater risk of SGBV, either due to direct targeting by conflict actors or while pursuing livelihood strategies to feed their families.<sup>45</sup> Leaving their settlements to collect wild fruits and vegetables, either seasonally or as part of their coping strategies, can leave both women and girls more vulnerable to SGBV, while not venturing out can mean their families risk hunger. Women often draw on social networks within their communities or extended families during times of crisis, however, this support can be compromised if a woman's main network is within their communities and all members have been affected by the same crisis.

Men and boys in South Sudan are exposed to different risks and vulnerabilities, due to the social expectations placed on them as protectors and providers of security for their families and communities. In rural pastoralist areas, social norms linked to payment of bride price in the form of cattle put young men under pressure to raid cattle and, as they are not viewed as men until they are married, this expectation valorises violence. In addition, the notions of violent masculinities which dominate, and which dictate what it means to be a 'real man' in South Sudan, also increases their exposure to risks, such as forced recruitment, violence associated with disarmament campaigns, and pressure to participate in sub-national and local violence.

The gender roles that are prevalent in South Sudan therefore put different expectations and pressures on women and men and impact their ability to navigate the different shocks and stresses that they experience. Most donors and aid actors recognise the critical role played by women within South Sudanese communities and the different capacities men and women have to access and control resources. However, even community resilience programmes are often 'captured' by older men, mirroring the patriarchal community decision-making structures, despite the best efforts of aid agencies to include women and young people. Furthermore, issues of capture are exacerbated by challenges INGOs and donors face in recruiting female staff, reflecting girls' limited access to education, which often results in women having less qualifications than their male peers. Substantive progress on changing social and gender norms to address male 'capture' and support the inclusion of women and other marginalised groups remains slow, particularly in rural areas. It is important to recognise the potential trade-offs between, for example, strengthening community leadership structures for violence prevention or to rapidly mobilise to respond to natural hazards, against the reality that these structures are deeply patriarchal and reflect traditional gender norms and can, therefore, restrict women's individual or women-headed household's resilience or flexibility to respond to challenges and threats.

Building community resilience from a gendered perspective must be based on a deep understanding of the nuances of gender relations and norms in South Sudan and how they intersect with resilience. A holistic approach that addresses gender inequalities and creates opportunities for women to meaningfully participate in public decision-making, while also tackling violent masculinities and the restrictive gender roles that boys and men are expected to fulfil, can improve the effectiveness and longer term sustainability of resilience initiatives.<sup>46</sup> From a conflict-sensitivity perspective, gender-sensitive conflict analysis should be part of any assessment prior to the design and development of resilience programming. However, this analysis also needs to be done on an ongoing basis, as part of regular programme monitoring, evaluation and learning processes. This will help teams to regularly consider the gendered impact of their interventions and practices and allow them to translate these findings into practical programming adaptations and actions that will lead to tangible and sustainable change.

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<sup>45</sup> Opondo M, Abdi U, Nangiro P (2016), '[Assessing gender in resilience programming](#)', BRACED Resilience Intel, 2 (2), January.

<sup>46</sup> Mercy Corps (2014), '[Rethinking Resilience: Prioritizing Gender Integration to Enhance Household and Community Resilience to Food Insecurity in the Sahel](#)', September.



## Climate crises, the environment and resilience

As demonstrated by the third consecutive year of ‘once in a lifetime floods’, South Sudan is highly vulnerable to crises caused by climate change, which will impact on livelihoods and food security in the short-term, as well as potentially longer-term migration and settlement patterns in the country, both of which could fuel insecurity, conflict and violence.<sup>47</sup> However, there is limited literature or research that looks at the links between climate crises, environmental degradation and conflict in South Sudan. The research that has been done suggests there are connections between crisis causes by climate change and conflict, and while climate change and related natural hazards are unlikely to be the sole causes of conflict, a recent ODI report notes that they act as a ‘threat multiplier’, compounding “existing stresses to increase the likelihood of violent conflict”<sup>48</sup> Not surprisingly, programmes seeking to ameliorate the effects of climate change have not traditionally been well-connected to peacebuilding activities, and visa versa. When developing a triple nexus approach to resilience programming in South Sudan, it is particularly important for aid actors to consider the impact of climate change in their discussions around programme design, planning and implementation.

Work on resilience in South Sudan, therefore, should not only consider conflict dynamics, but also how climate change related crises are affecting these dynamics, as climate change may be reducing the availability of natural resources, often a key driver of conflict, or shifting their geographic location. For example, conflict and localised violence is often a result of pastoralists seeking access to water or pastures for their livestock. The scarcity or shifting of grazing lands or water availability linked to climate change could result in pastoralists moving further afield to secure these resources, causing tensions between communities **seeking to access** and those **controlling access** to those resources. In addition, as can be seen by the flooding and resulting population movements in 2019 and 2020, extreme events (like flooding) also bring with them the risk of exacerbating conflict due to fears over the potentially permanent re-settlement of flood-displaced populations in new areas.<sup>49</sup>

Potential socio-economic losses and damages resulting from climate change related crises in South Sudan have been, and will increasingly be, significant as a large proportion of the population are reliant on subsistence agriculture or livestock for their food security and livelihoods. Ongoing work that seeks to build resilience to climate change related crises includes projects such as BRACE II, discussed above.

While such initiatives are obviously valuable, it is important that the links between climate change related crises and conflict are explored and better understood, including how they reinforce one another. It is also important to understand and support resilience-building among the individuals (women and men) and communities who can play a role in addressing the specific ways climate change is contributing to greater insecurity, poverty, and marginalisation their communities.

## South Sudanese civil society and researchers

In South Sudan, national and local NGOs have a history of using an integrated approach to programming that could be considered resilience-focused, as they often shift between humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding activities, depending on community priorities and funding available. Faced with the request to respond to an emergency, South Sudanese organisations will use the resources they have available immediately, while also seeking funding to respond to the most urgent needs. This often makes them best placed to identify areas of complementary impact. However, they

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<sup>47</sup> de Coning CH, Krampe F, Tchier AEY, Grand AO, Tarif K (2021), ‘[Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet, South Sudan](#)’, SIPRI/NUPI, March.

<sup>48</sup> Peters Km Dupar M, Opitz-Stapleton S, Lovell E, Cao Y (2020), ‘[Climate change, conflict and fragility: An evidence review and recommendations for research and action](#)’, ODI and Practical Action, June, p 10.

<sup>49</sup> Quinn C, Fox A, Baroang K, Evans D, Gomes M, Habib J (2019), ‘[South Sudan Climate and Vulnerability Profile: Sector and Location Specific Climate Risks and Resilience Recommendations](#)’, USAID, May.

are often excluded from the decision-making processes across the aid sector and tasked with delivery only. Several national NGO staff interviewed for this research expressed frustration that they are not treated as equal partners in resilience programming and coordination, even though they often provide the ‘last mile’ programming and focused on resilience **before** it was taken up by the international aid community. Finally, women-led organisation often face particular challenges, as they struggle not only to access funding, especially if they are not Juba-based, but also cope with gender norms that stifle or de-value their voices. As a result, and even though most, if not all, donors, and international aid agencies champion both localisation and gender equality, and acknowledge women’s role in building resilient households and communities, South Sudanese organisations, particularly women-led organisations, are less likely to be funded.<sup>50</sup>

There is also a growing pool of experienced and locally-grounded South Sudanese researchers and academics associated with organisations and networks such as the [Rift Valley Institute](#) or [The Bridge Network, South Sudan](#) or academic institutions such as the [University of Juba](#), the [Catholic University of South Sudan](#) or the UK-based [London School of Economics and Political Science](#). Based across the country, these researchers and academics frequently travel for research, or to visit families or friends. As a result, they often have intimate knowledge (often unavailable to international staff with donors or operational agencies) about the priorities of and challenges facing their relatives or friends in rural or hard to reach areas. However, as noted by a recent report from The Bridge Network, “[g]lobal inequalities and power dynamics generally place southern researchers at the forefront of research projects...Sometimes they gain comparatively little from the research outputs and until recently their experiences have remained mostly hidden. In general, their contributions have been significantly under-reported”.<sup>51</sup> Given that education or capacity-building is often cited as strategic priorities for building the resilience of individuals and communities, proactively and consistently reaching out to South Sudanese researchers/academics, in a collaborative, rather than extractive, manner, could deepen international aid actors’ understanding of how their programmes are experienced by individuals and communities and supplement the information collected through the more formal monitoring and evaluation mechanisms used as part of the programme cycle.

**South Sudanese Researchers**

‘We provide new insights into the demands of research in South Sudan and highlight the specific dilemmas involved in being not only a participant observer, but also a member of the community under ‘observation’, whose lives and families were personally affected by many of the issues we were documenting...’

*Source:* [Researching in Conflict: Interviews from the Bridge Network Archive](#), p 4.

## Resilience initiatives – PfRR, RSRTF and REN

Resilience programming is not a new phenomenon in South Sudan and, indeed, many development and humanitarian donors and aid agencies have been supporting work for decades that contributes to resilience, without it being labelled as such. In 2018 there was an uptick in interest in specific resilience focused work though which led to the establishment of the Partnership for Resilience and Recovery (PfRR) and the Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience Trust Fund (RSRTF), as well as members of the NGO Forum initiating the Resilience Exchange Network (REN). All of which are indicated an increased interest in, and uptake of, approaches to build resilience among international aid actors in South Sudan.

<sup>50</sup> CSRF Interview, 19 April 2021, female

<sup>51</sup> The Bridge Network, Awany J (2021), ‘[Researching in Conflict: Interviews from the Bridge Network Archive](#)’, LSE: Conflict Research Programme, July, p 4.



## Approaches

The PfRR strives to lessen the vulnerability of local communities in Yambio, Aweil, Torit and Wau. Its membership is drawn from donors, UN, INGO and N/LNGO partners and it aims to co-ordinate its members' activities in these partnership areas (PAs).<sup>52</sup> Working with multiple South Sudanese and international actors on four 'pillars' (re-establishing access to basic services, rebuilding trust in people and institutions, restoring productive capacities, and nurturing and broadening effective partnerships), it emphasises bottom-up approaches to resilience, and it commits to integrating conflict sensitivity and flexibility into all its work. The PAs are encouraged to develop community-led local partnership committees and priority action plans, and are provided with technical assistance to develop them. This enables the PfRR "to develop new, inclusive ways of doing business to better help communities adapt and cope with the multiple shocks they face"<sup>53</sup> Despite PfRR's focus on the community level, it is perceived by some as quite Juba-centric and the involvement of contractors, such as MSI and DAI, has led to a proliferation of complex tools and steps which could be intimidating for those unfamiliar with such processes, particularly South Sudanese organisations or actors.<sup>54</sup>

There is no central evaluation process for the PfRR, as implementing partners are responsible to their own organisations and agencies. An Annual Learning Forum is held, which seeks to "bring partners together to track progress, identify lessons, gaps and challenges, and define next steps", and prior to the Forums, meetings are held in each PA to discuss community suggestions.<sup>55</sup> The 2019 Annual Forum acknowledged that while there was increased recognition of the need to coordinate to address the multiple and complex drivers affecting communities (i.e., conflict, instability, poverty and vulnerability), in practice, engaging beyond measuring and planning programmes was proving challenging. Finally, there is the perception that the PfRR tends to be led by internationals, with South Sudanese playing a lesser role, and that "this hinders the contextualisation of resilience. Although internationals bring in a lot of expertise from outside, some of these lessons might not be applicable to South Sudan."<sup>56</sup>

The RSRTF is a joint initiative of the UN Country Team (UNCT), United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) and key donor countries. It aims to create a more stable and secure environment in the short term to pave the way for more resilience focused programming in the long term. Focusing on areas where sub-national and localised conflicts have been prevalent, it works to foster peace and reconciliation between communities through activities that build their longer-term resilience.<sup>57</sup> Unlike the PfRR, the RSRTF focuses on the most fragile and marginalised areas by working through a network of UN agencies and NGOs and drawing on UNMISS' political engagement and peacekeeping capacities. RSRTF explicitly mentions a focus on integrated programming across the

### Resilience Initiatives

**REN** (February 2018) is an initiative of the NGO Forum to improve coordination amongst its members implementing resilience programmes, open-ended.

**PfRR** (March 2018) focuses primarily on areas that are considered 'stable', takes a multi-sectoral approach, and works with both UN agencies and NGOs. Leadership is provided by USAID and UNDP. It is open-ended and multi-donor funded but does not have a dedicated funding stream.

**RSTRF** (Sept 2018) uses an area-based approach, focusing on parts of the country that have been significantly affected by recent conflict. It is a multi-donor trust fund managed by UNMISS and the UNCT and funds UN agencies, INGOs and N/LNGOs. It is due to end 30 June 2026.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> South Sudan [Partnership for Resilience and Recovery](#).

<sup>54</sup> Email feedback to CSRF from a staff member of an INGO participating in the PfRR

<sup>55</sup> South Sudan [Partnership for Resilience and Recovery](#).

<sup>56</sup> CSRF Interview, 15 January 2021, male.

<sup>57</sup> [South Sudan Reconciliation, Stabilization, Resilience Trust Fund](#).

triple nexus and using conflict and gender analyses to bridge silos to develop a “whole of system” approach within a geographic area.<sup>58</sup> One of the main reasons the RSRTF was established was to leverage funding strategically across the nexus without earmarking. A key lesson identified after the RSRTF’s first two years was “the need to proactively invest in strong coordination for the ‘triple nexus’ approach to succeed.”<sup>59</sup> As such, at least on paper, the Fund is actively seeking to break down silos to ensure programming has the most impact.

The EN<sup>60</sup> was established by national and international NGOs to: “facilitate networking and coordination of NGOs engaged in resilience programming in South Sudan; provide a platform through which NGOs share knowledge, expertise and learning on resilience programming, and potential mainstreaming of the resilience agenda within and across development and humanitarian interventions in South Sudan and; provide opportunities for joint representation and communication on resilience programming with the wider humanitarian infrastructure through internal and external collaboration and engagement.”<sup>61</sup> Hosted by the South Sudan NGO Forum, the REN encouraged its members to collaborate across their different areas of programming and therefore break down siloes between sectors. However, with launching of the PfRR, it was felt that the REN could be duplicating the efforts of this initiative and it was agreed that the NGOs would focus on engaging through the PfRR rather than their own separate network.<sup>62</sup> The decision by the NGO Forum and its members is entirely understandable, given the opportunity costs associated with participating in coordination mechanisms. However, considering the observations that the PfRR tends to be Juba-centric and led by internationals, this was a missed opportunity by the NGO Forum to bring a strong, coordinated voice representing both international **and** national NGOs who have an extensive field presence to the broader resilience discussions and programming.

All three of these initiatives seek to coordinate resilience activities across the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors. The extent to which they have been ‘successful’ is, however, mixed. Where they have fallen short, this should not be seen by aid actors as a ‘failure’, given the complexity of the context and the structural barriers that can inhibit coordination and collaboration within the aid system. The successes and shortcomings of these different mechanisms and operating modalities provide the broader aid community with the opportunity to learn from the experiences and to adapt their approaches and programming. This will be particularly important as the aid community grapples with how to operationalise the triple nexus, which also faces similar complexities as it tries to straddle the same humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding ‘silos’. RSRTF is the most formal mechanism, rooted in the UN system and as a trust fund it has associated funding sources and a dedicated secretariat, while the PfRR is more of a donor-/UN-led coordination mechanism, although it established PA projects and an operating framework, both of which have planned objectives and outcomes. The REN was designed to be a more informal network for INGOs and N/LNGOs, and as such, lacked both dedicated staff and funding, and was subsequently folded into the PfRR when it was established.

As noted, the RSRTF and PfRR have specific and different geographic focus, and much of their resilience programming targets rural areas. This could be seen as a gap, given that urban centres often experience similar shocks, such as flooding, and can often be a destination for households displaced by conflict and natural hazards. However, it must also be noted that the majority of South Sudanese still live in rural communities and ensuring that urban-focused programming does not become a ‘pull’ factor for unsustainable rural to urban migration is important. In addition, in states such as Upper Nile and Lakes, where communities have been affected by both natural hazards and

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> [RSRTF \(2020\), ‘Consolidated Annual and Financial Report \(2020\)’](#), p 40.

<sup>60</sup> Some of the REN members included World Vision, Goal, Oxfam, Save the Children, STO, Plan International.

<sup>61</sup> South Sudan NGO Forum: [Resilience Exchange Network](#).

<sup>62</sup> Email communication, NGO Forum Director (12 and 19 November 2021).

conflict, have not benefited yet from initiatives such as the RSRTF or the PfRR. While finite funding availability means that such programmes cannot cover the entire country, care needs to be taken to ensure that decisions around geographic focus do not fuel tensions between identity groups in South Sudan or inadvertently contribute to a narrative of marginalisation. When considering other resilience programming, it will be important for both donors and aid agencies to consider prioritising areas that have not benefitted from either the PfRR or the RSRTF.

As noted above, although all three mechanisms committed to working across the sectors, there are still challenges to doing so, particularly when donors and aid agencies both face funding pressures and the need to demonstrate value for money when achieving outcomes. Internal politics within aid agencies and donors, as well as divergent objectives, can, and often do, affect the coordination of resilience interventions. In addition, the geographical disbursement of much of South Sudan’s population and limited infrastructure means that a large proportion of South Sudan’s population lives in sparsely populated rural areas, which are both hard and expensive to reach. As a result, resilience programming investments can have a high ‘cost per beneficiary’, a challenge that should not be underestimated in a time of increasingly tighter donor aid budgets.

### Towards an integrated and conflict-sensitive approach to resilience

Until recently, resilience work tended to focus on shocks and stresses related to livelihoods, food security, climate, and economy, but often without considering how they effect, and are affected by, conflict. However, there is renewed interest in the interplay between conflict and resilience. Mercy Corps’ studies in South Sudan have highlighted that food

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**“Conflict directly undermines livelihoods and resilience through its effects on people’s assets and the systems upon which their livelihoods depend “**

*Dan Maxwell, et al, ‘Conflict and Resilience’*

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security at the household level is heavily impacted by not only economic and climate-related shocks, but also by recurrent conflict.<sup>63</sup> As much as conflict is a key driver of food and livelihood insecurity, food and livelihood security can also be a cause of conflict. For instance, assets that contribute to food and livelihood security can be liabilities when those owning or controlling them are being targeted, **precisely because of those assets.**<sup>64</sup>

Conflict remains a key factor that influences resilience. As the focus on resilience programming has increased, there has been a corresponding commitment to integrating conflict sensitivity into resilience programming. Many of the respondents for this research shared examples of conflict-sensitive resilience programming: the ability for an agency to understand the context of its operation because of their length of time they have spent in an area;<sup>65</sup> the involvement of all key stakeholders in the awareness campaign on gender and COVID-19 in Torit;<sup>66</sup> and working through existing mechanisms to identify needs in the community.<sup>67</sup> Respondents also shared examples of conflict-**insensitive** programming: the exclusion of men from a sexual and reproductive education programme in Aweil that fuelled tensions between men and women<sup>68</sup> or the exclusion of national staff from key decisions in resilience coordination mechanisms.<sup>69</sup> Resilience programmes that are not conflict-

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<sup>63</sup> Kurtz J, McMahon K (2015), [‘Pathways from Peace to Resilience: Evidence from the Greater Horn of Africa on the Links between Conflict Management and Resilience to Food Security Shocks’](#), Mercy Corps.

<sup>64</sup> Maxwell, et al., op. cit., p 8.

<sup>65</sup> CSRF interview, 1 December 2020, male

<sup>66</sup> CSRF interview, 27 January 2021, female

<sup>67</sup> CSRF interview 1, 15 January 2021, male

<sup>68</sup> CSRF interview, 27 January 2021, female

<sup>69</sup> CSRF interview 1, 15 January 2021, male

sensitive risk undermining the very resiliency they are seeking to build. Those that undermine the effectiveness of existing positive local mechanisms and coping strategies also risk the same.

Even with a shared commitment to conflict sensitivity and resilience, as demonstrated by the explicit commitments made by PfRR, RSRTF and REN, operationalising a more integrated approach within programmes, agencies and sectors remains a challenge. As conflict continues to drive displacement in South Sudan, there is increased interest in triple nexus programming. However, as noted above, donor funding is often allocated from ‘pots’ designated ‘humanitarian’, ‘development’ and/or ‘peacebuilding’, and implementing agencies often see themselves as having a mandate that prioritises one over the others. At the same time, humanitarian programming has the most robust coordination mechanisms, which are, understandably, focused on the humanitarian response, and it can be difficult for those implementing development and peacebuilding programmes to engage with them. Given the current aid architecture, coordinated and effective resilience programming (and the triple nexus approach) may require the aid community to look ways to manage these structural challenges with regards to both funding and implementing resilience or nexus programming.<sup>70</sup>

These challenges could hamper collective efforts to respond effectively to both the drivers and consequences of shocks and stresses. Development programmes primarily focus on long-term needs, such as infrastructure, services and building the capacity of the bureaucratic and institutional mechanisms needed for the sustainable and effective delivery of core services, and as such are not intended to respond to shocks or crises. On the other hand, the *raison d’être* or priority for humanitarian responses is to save lives and ameliorate the immediate impact of shocks and crises on individuals and communities, leaving them largely unable to address the root causes of vulnerability. Finally, peacebuilding activities tend to focus on building or repairing relationships between groups, and does not typically provide tangible, lifesaving support, infrastructure and basic services, or build bureaucratic and institutional mechanisms. However, it can help to lay the foundations for each of these, by ensuring that people can access and use them in ways that support peace and build social cohesion, ultimately making them more effective and sustainable.

All three sectors have important and complementary skillsets, mechanisms, and experience, and improved coordination and collaboration between them could result in a more holistic approach that builds the resiliency of individuals and communities. Perhaps most importantly, however, for communities where agencies work, an organisation’s mandate or where the donor ‘pot’ funds are allocated from are of little consequence – they are looking for support to cope with times of crisis and build their resilience in a way that does not undermine their longer-term efforts around peace and security.

National and local NGOs (N/LNGOs), who have roots in the local context, are often well-versed in integrated programming approaches, due to the community expectations that their programmes will address both their short- and long-term priorities. To maintain their credibility with communities and keep their staff costs low, many N/LNGOs tend to combine their activities across the development-humanitarian-peacebuilding divide, reflecting an underlying commitment to building resilience. Research by DanChurchAid found that “almost seventy percent of the local actors interviewed work in multi-sectoral, integrated programs, often

**Learning from South Sudanese actors?**

‘Local actors pointed out how their position as community members enables them to see communities’ needs holistically and not compartmentalized as is often the case in the international aid sector. A duality between international and local actors was also highlighted by the interviewees. International actors are said to have resources and capacities, but “lack context understanding or analysis” (LFA staff member in South Sudan, 2019).’

Source: ‘[The Triple Nexus and Local Faith Actors in South Sudan: Findings from Primary Research](#)’, DanChurchAid, p 15

<sup>70</sup> Kelly L (2020), ‘[Evidence on resilience approaches in fragile and conflict-affected states and protracted crises](#)’, July, p 172.)

incorporating humanitarian, development, and peace activities that constitute the Triple Nexus approach.”<sup>71</sup> Despite their knowledge and flexibility, a common refrain from international staff when discussing the role of N/LNGOs, or South Sudanese researchers or academics, is that ‘they can be biased’, without recognising or accepting that international staff and experts can **also** be biased. Similarly, the feeling that N/LNGO staff ‘lack capacity’ is often reflective of limitations on their ability to navigate the complex bureaucracy and reporting requirements of many UN/INGO/donor agencies (a limitation that can also be found within UN/INGO staff as well), or real capacity gaps in management or programming that could be addressed through institutional strengthening support from those same agencies. By focusing on capacity, rather than the experience with and knowledge of integrating different interventions that the N/LNGOs have, donors and international actors risk missing the opportunity to learn from their South Sudanese colleagues about how to effectively adapt programming to operationalise and integrate resilience and triple nexus approaches.

A siloed or linear approach to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming is being challenged across the aid sector. In complex and fluid contexts, such as South Sudan, programmes that work to address the root causes of conflict and poverty exist alongside programming that is addressing immediate needs. There is a legitimate role for peacebuilding and development actors, **even during a crisis**, as they bring focused and specialised expertise that can strengthen humanitarian response and ensure it does not undermine the longer-term resilience or reconciliation efforts. This does not mean, however, that peacebuilding- and development-focused organisations should shift to emergency response, or that humanitarians should become peacebuilders. Rather, improving coordination and valuing the complementary skills and reinforcing mechanisms that each brings would improve the overall effectiveness and impact of resilience programming across South Sudan. The incentives within the system, namely different organisational teams/mandates and discrete ‘pots’ of funding, can hamper coordination, collaboration and critical self-reflection. Likewise, agencies that are best placed to identify those areas of complementary impact – South Sudanese N/LNGOs, researchers and other civil society actors – are often either excluded from the decision-making processes and tasked with delivery only or are overlooked as sources of insight or learning. The key challenge is that all these actors need to operate with sufficient awareness of, and sensitivity to, areas of potential complementary impact, and be willing to value and create opportunities for broader collaboration.

There has been progress, as can be seen by programmes and initiatives such as the PfRR, RSRTF and the REN, all of which sought to have complementary programming goals between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors.<sup>72</sup> In addition, an increasing number of key strategic documents have goals or objectives that humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors could organise around, such as the South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) which highlights the centrality of protection, improving food security, and gender-responsive programming.<sup>73</sup> Other opportunities could include joint context/assessment missions that have participants drawn from international and national humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors, and with an explicit mandate to identify coordinated and complementary programmes that would address both short- and long-term community priorities.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Wilkinson O, de Wolf F, Alier M (2019), [‘The Triple Nexus and Local Faith Actors in South Sudan: Findings from Primary Research’](#), Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, DanChurchAid, p 5

<sup>72</sup> Zamore L (2019), [‘The Triple Nexus in Practice: Toward a New Way of Working in Protracted and Repeated Crises’](#), New York University: Center on International Cooperation, December, p 14.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p 31.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p 26.

## Conclusion

Resilience has no single definition, rather donors and aid agencies interpret and adapt the concept to reflect their own mandates and focus. While these differences do not have to adversely affect resilience coordination and implementation, they can create tensions among donors and aid agencies and reinforce perceived silos. This can, in turn, reduce the effectiveness and impact of resilience-related programming by not focusing on the needs and priorities communities' have identified, but rather those of a donor or agency, based on their mandate, sectoral focus, or whether the funding comes from a 'development', 'humanitarian' or 'peacebuilding' pot.

Communities' resilience strategies are influenced by the opportunities available to them, the nature of the shocks and stresses that they face, and how they are experienced by men, women, boys, and girls. Gender norms and roles can significantly impact individuals' vulnerabilities and how they are able (or not) to 'bounce back' from the different shocks affecting them. While women, in their traditional role as caregivers, can find themselves resorting to risky coping strategies and vulnerable to SGBV, men face different challenges related to social expectations about what it takes to be a 'real man' and their social role as the 'protector' of their family and community. Resilience programmes need to be based on a granular and contextually specific understanding of social and gender norms, social networks and conflict dynamics of the communities and localities where they are being implemented.

The PfRR, RSRTF and REN all sought or seek to coordinate resilience programming and funding across the triple nexus. They have varied roles and approaches, but each espouses the importance of conflict sensitivity and of community-led programmes. They are funded and supported by many of the same donors and operate in various locations across the country. However, their long-term effectiveness is yet to be fully established, in part because the impact of such mechanisms takes time to become apparent, and the fluid operating context and disruptions caused by conflict and COVID-19 delayed programme activities and coordination efforts. Finally, learning from these mechanisms' successes and challenges offers the potential to move beyond the principle of breaking down siloes, to doing so in practice, and thereby enhancing the conflict sensitivity and positive impact on peace of all programming in South Sudan.

## Recommendations:

- 1. Conflict sensitivity and gender considerations should be seen as fundamental to designing and developing effective and integrated resilience programming and coordination mechanisms.** Conflict sensitivity and gender considerations should be seen as fundamental to designing and developing effective and integrated resilience programming and coordination mechanisms. To deepen understanding of how conflict dynamics and gender norms impact on resilience in complex and context-specific ways, gender-sensitive conflict analysis should be conducted prior to designing a programme and be updated on an ongoing basis. This will help to maximise the positive roles played by both women and men in building resilient communities and to avoid inadvertently exacerbating local tensions or undermining local resilience initiatives or networks. There is no 'one size fits all' approach appropriate for South Sudan. Focusing solely on men or women risks undermining the limited gains that have been made on gender equality in South Sudan and misunderstanding the complementary roles that both can play in building resilient communities. Furthermore, recognising the roles that women *and* men play in building resiliency can also provide the foundation for longer-term peacebuilding work, which is critical to



addressing the underlying drivers of conflict and its resulting shocks and transforming harmful gender norms.<sup>75</sup>

2. **Be more proactive in adopting bottom-up and context-specific resilience coordination and programming approaches.** Defining ‘resilience’ is context- and community-specific. South Sudanese communities’, as well as local authorities’, understanding of resilience and the factors they consider important for resilience may not necessarily be the same ones that the donors or aid agencies would focus on. This does not mean that all resilience strategies are positive, however, as some can be predicated on actions taken by more powerful or influential individuals and communities, often to the detriment of less powerful or marginalised individuals or communities, further fuelling marginalisation, insecurity, and conflict.
3. **Increase the involvement of South Sudanese expertise in the design and implementation of resilience programmes, and only bring in international experts to complement, not replace, this expertise.** Not only are South Sudanese researchers and N/LNGOs often more familiar with the coping and resilience strategies used by communities and households, but national staff working for INGOs, and donors are also often overlooked as sources of expertise. Aid actors should be more willing to sensitively engage with South Sudanese academics, N/LNGOs and national staff on how their families and communities cope with crisis, build resilience, and what strategies have contributed to peace or created tension and conflict. More proactively reaching out to South Sudanese could also create better links between local communities, INGOs and donors, and increase both the acceptance and effectiveness of resilience programmes.
4. **Capitalise on and learn from efforts, such as the PfRR and RSRTF, to inform area-based approaches to bring together actors and strengthen co-ordination across development, peacebuilding, and humanitarian actors.** There is increased interest in an area-based approach to management and decision-making across donors, UN agencies, INGOs and N/LNGOs. This provides humanitarian coordination mechanisms with the opportunity to learn from what has worked, and what has not, within the PfRR and RSRTF, as well as help international and national aid actors to engage with local organisations more actively, as many do not have offices in Juba. This will benefit not only humanitarian response and resilience programming but contribute to ongoing efforts to operationalise the triple nexus approach.
5. **Ensure that coordination mechanisms that seek to bring together development, peacebuilding and humanitarian actors are properly resourced and supported.** While coordination can improve the effectiveness and conflict sensitivity of resilience programming, it also comes with financial, time and opportunity costs for both agencies and individual staff members. The RSRTF and the PfRR, both of which are active, have the necessary financial and human resources, as well as the clear mandate, needed to function. On the other hand, the REN and the Peace Actors Network were more informal mechanisms, reliant on the ability of their members to ‘carve out’ the time and resources needed to function, and the research struggled to find evidence that either network is functioning and active.
6. **NGOs should revitalise the Resilience Exchange Network, hosted by the NGO Forum, and ensure there is a balance in its Technical Working Group between INGOs and N/LNGOs.** The REN was a good initiative by the NGO community and has the potential to be an active NGO focused learning space to inform the broader aid community thinking on both resilience and the triple nexus. However, it has been inactive since the launching of the PfRR. Revitalising this space and having an explicit outreach to N/LNGOs to learn from them would both recognise the valuable insights that N/LNGOs have on resilience programming. This would also challenge the traditional

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<sup>75</sup> See Saferworld’s facilitation guide ‘[Gender-sensitive conflict analysis](#)’, which primarily targets peacebuilders, as well as the CARE/IASC GenCap/Oxfam report ‘[From the Ground Up: Gender and Conflict Analysis in Yemen](#)’ which looks at gender and conflict in a humanitarian setting.

international/national aid community relationship, thereby contributing to the broader 'Grand Bargain' agenda of shifting power dynamics within the aid sector.

7. **NGOs should revitalise the Resilience Exchange Network, hosted by the NGO Forum, and ensure there is a balance in its Technical Working Group between INGOs and N/LNGOs.** The REN was a good initiative by the NGO community and has the potential to be an active NGO-focused learning space to inform the broader aid community's thinking on both resilience and the triple nexus. However, the group has been inactive since the launching of the PfRR. Revitalising this space and having an explicit outreach to N/LNGOs to learn from them would both recognise the valuable insights that N/LNGOs have on resilience programming and turn the traditional international/national aid community relationship on its head, thereby contributing to the broader 'Grand Bargain' agenda of challenging power dynamics within the aid sector.
8. **Learn from, and about, positive local coping mechanisms and strategies that South Sudanese communities and households have used and are using now and build upon them to support longer term resilience.** The resiliency of South Sudanese households and communities should not be underestimated. South Sudanese men, women, boys, and girls have withstood decades of violence and civil war, and in so doing, developed coping strategies that have allowed them to survive, and in some instances thrive. Key to this learning will be listening to locally based organisations and having them advise international agencies, rather than the other way around.



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