

# Better Together?

## Prospects and Lessons for Improving Coordination and Collaboration between Humanitarians and Peacebuilders in South Sudan

CSRF Learning Paper<sup>1</sup>

Improving collaboration, coordination and learning between humanitarians and peacebuilders is an ongoing challenge. Despite their different approaches, both groups need to rise to this challenge to help achieve their shared goal for the future of South Sudan – that South Sudanese live prosperous, dignified, and secure lives. This paper seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how, where, and when stronger coordination, collaboration and learning between humanitarians and peacebuilders will more effectively leverage each other's contribution to achieving this shared goal. It seeks to draw on the ongoing discussions around resilience, Triple/HDP Nexus and conflict sensitivity by exploring the context, rationale, dilemmas and lessons arising from emerging 'better practices' in South Sudan. Based on these lessons it suggests actionable next steps intended to stimulate reflection and dialogue between aid actors in South Sudan in order to strengthen collective impact.

### Introduction

In few places are the linkages between humanitarian need and conflict as stark as in South Sudan. Having funded and delivered life-saving humanitarian assistance since the outbreak of the Second Sudanese Civil War nearly forty years ago, donors and operational agencies have increasingly sought to address the longer-term drivers of humanitarian need and conflict using more coordinated approaches. At the policy level, this ambition reflects the global commitments to the 'humanitarian-development-peace (or triple) nexus'<sup>2</sup> and the UN's 'Sustaining Peace' agenda.<sup>3</sup> In South Sudan, efforts to put the Triple/HDP Nexus into practice have been framed mostly in terms of 'resilience' programming involving collaboration between humanitarian and development actors.<sup>4</sup> Such programmes have tended to focus on longer-term programming focused on support to livelihoods, infrastructure and local government to reduce vulnerability to future shocks. While well-designed 'resilience' programmes may help to address drivers of conflict, there has been less explicit focus on the potential for coordination and collaboration between humanitarian and peacebuilding actors.<sup>5</sup>

This learning paper seeks to provide humanitarian workers and peacebuilders with a clearer understanding of how, where, and when stronger coordination and collaboration between the sectors can contribute to achieving collective objectives in South Sudan. It draws on interviews and discussions with 31 aid professionals, analysts and civil society representatives in South Sudan, a review of research and project documents, and personal observations from the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility's (CSRF) participation in, and support to, the aid sector in South Sudan. The interviewees represent a cross-section of the aid ecosystem in South Sudan, and includes international and South

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<sup>1</sup> The lead author of this paper is Robert Morris (CSRF Learning Adviser) with support from the wider CSRF team. The CSRF extends its thanks to the wide range of aid professionals and analysts that shared their experiences and perspectives, and especially to the Learning Reference Group that helped to shape emerging findings and earlier drafts. The names of these individuals and organisational affiliations have not been listed here given the sensitive nature of some discussions and to avoid attribution of quotations back to these individuals. Feedback, comments or suggestions are welcomed and should be sent to [info@csrf-southsudan.org](mailto:info@csrf-southsudan.org).

<sup>2</sup> ICVA (2018), '[Learning Stream: Navigating the Nexus. Topic 1: The 'Nexus' explained](#)'.

<sup>3</sup> UN (2018), '[Report of the Secretary-General: Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, A/72/707](#)', 18 January 2018.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PfRR) or area-based Hubs of Stability have so far tended to focus on areas with a much lower intensity of violence and more 'stable' conflict systems. See page 5.

<sup>5</sup> Quack, M. and Südhoff, R. (2020), '[The Triple Nexus in South Sudan: Learning from Local Opportunities](#)', October 2020 (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Action).

Sudanese staff from humanitarian, peacebuilding and multi-mandate organisations, South Sudanese and international organisations, and donors and operational agencies.

Those interviewed had varied and often conflicting perspectives and experiences that in part reflect institutional and sectoral silos. The CSRF is grateful to the contributions of the Learning Reference Group in providing feedback and guidance navigating the sensitivities involved in bridging these silos and ensuring a constructive tone. Finally, this paper seeks to respect these different positions and surface good practices to stimulate further reflection and learning among the aid community.

### Who are ‘humanitarians’ and ‘peacebuilders’?

For the purposes of this paper, ‘humanitarians’ and ‘peacebuilders’ are defined and distinguished according to their primary mandates.

‘**Humanitarians**’ for instance have the distinct mandate to deliver emergency or early recovery assistance to address humanitarian need. This definition applies to most aid professionals and programmes in South Sudan – ranging from large UN agencies to smaller national NGOs. Common examples of support delivered by humanitarians include food supplies, shelter, water, healthcare, education, and short-term protection from threats. Such support is often focused more on delivering outputs to meet specific *needs* rather than using processes to agree priorities and shape support in pursuit of these (i.e., oriented primarily around ‘ends’ rather than the ‘means’).

By contrast, ‘**peacebuilders**’ have a primary mandate to address drivers of conflict and promote peace. Examples of approaches used by peacebuilders include awareness-raising, community meetings, facilitated dialogues, mediation, reconciliation, and trauma healing. These activities tend to use *processes* to support longer-term aspirations for peace rather than delivering pre-specified *outputs* (i.e., oriented primarily around ‘means’ rather than ‘ends’). The UNMISS has been excluded as a ‘special case’ given its specific peacekeeping mandate and its coverage in more depth elsewhere in the literature.<sup>6,7</sup>

While many organisations have a dedicated focus on either one of these objectives, in practice there are few ‘pure’ humanitarian or peacebuilding organisations. Many ‘**multi-mandate**’ organisations implement both life-saving emergency assistance and more transformative support designed to tackling longer-term drivers of need, such as conflict, although in practice these are often delivered by different teams to avoid perceived tensions between these objectives and preserve humanitarian space. This paper therefore speaks to coordination and collaboration both between *organisations*, as well as between *teams* delivering humanitarian and peacebuilding programmes within the same organisation.

The paper does not distinguish pure ‘**development actors**’ focused on long-term needs as their presence in South Sudan has been more limited over the past decade. This is partly because donors have been reluctant to fund activities that include longer-term investments or the government as a direct beneficiary in the absence of more progress on the country’s peace process. As a result, to the extent that more developmental activities have been delivered (such as dyke construction, market development, or livelihoods training), they have mostly been delivered by multi-mandate organisations with simultaneous humanitarian mandates. These initiatives can play a valuable role but are covered in the wider literature on ‘resilience programming’ and ‘New Ways of Working’ in South Sudan.<sup>8,9,10</sup> This paper therefore instead focuses primarily on the relationship between ‘humanitarians’ and ‘peacebuilders’ given the perceived tension between these sectors.

<sup>6</sup> Zambakari, C. et al. (2019), *The Role of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in Protecting Civilians*, in ‘The Challenge of Governance in South Sudan’ (London: Routledge).

<sup>7</sup> Day, A. (2019), *Assessing the effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)*. (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs).

<sup>8</sup> Concern Worldwide (2018), *Improving Resilience in South Sudan: experiences and learning*, October 2018.

<sup>9</sup> USAID (2018), *Annex 1: Partnership for Resilience and Recovery Framework*.

<sup>10</sup> OCHA (2017), *New Ways of Working*, OCHA Policy Development and Studies Branch.

## Rationale for coordination and collaboration<sup>11</sup>

Humanitarians and peacebuilders have long worked side-by-side in southern Sudan (and later South Sudan) in pursuit of a shared objective to prevent or alleviate human suffering. This section explores how these objectives relate to one another in South Sudan and how the different capacities of humanitarians and peacebuilders can complement each other.

### Shared objectives

Violent conflict has been a major driver of humanitarian need in South Sudan for well over three decades and remains a barrier to durable solutions for the remaining 8.9 million people in need.<sup>12</sup> Often this need has arisen due to violent conflict resulting in forced displacement, destruction of productive assets and denial of access to civilian populations. These tactics have been used deliberately by government and armed groups, prior to and following South Sudan's independence, to manipulate the delivery of humanitarian assistance in pursuit of their objectives.<sup>13</sup> In this context, humanitarian actors have an interest in preventing and addressing violent conflict to ensure affected populations have access to water, food, shelter and health. There is also overlap between humanitarian 'protection' and 'peacebuilding' initiatives given the Protection Principles' requirement that all humanitarian actors must "enhance the safety, dignity and rights of people" by "tak[ing] steps to reduce overall risks and vulnerability".<sup>14</sup> This is especially the case for humanitarian protection work focused on housing, land, and property rights (HLP), rule of law and justice, and human rights.

From the opposite perspective, humanitarian need has had a significant effect on drivers of conflict in South Sudan. For example, communities' struggles to address their unmet basic needs amid conflict has contributed to population movements that have intensified competition over grazing land, water, and other resources. The lack of livelihoods available to young men and associated food insecurity – among other factors – lays the foundation for grievances that leave them particularly vulnerable to recruitment into and exploitation by armed groups, which fuels further conflict, withdrawal of services, and escalating humanitarian need in a vicious cycle. While humanitarian assistance has the potential to shape such conflict dynamics, the distributive impact of such aid in South Sudan has not addressed the historical and perceived patterns of marginalisation that drive the cycle of conflict and humanitarian need in South Sudan. Peacebuilders therefore have an interest in addressing these patterns of vulnerability and humanitarian need that drive conflict.

### Complementary approaches

In theory, coordination and collaboration between those working primarily on humanitarian response and peacebuilding initiatives should be desirable given the complementary approaches and capacities they bring to the table. As outlined below, there are frequently trade-offs between these approaches and capacities that reflect operational and contextual realities, although in practice humanitarian and peacebuilding programmes fall on a spectrum between 'ideal types'. By working together,

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<sup>11</sup> Whereas 'information sharing' involves saying "I'm doing this...", 'coordination' involves saying "I'll do this if you do that" and 'collaboration' involves saying "Let's do this together". Coordination and collaboration therefore require shared information to be used to adapt decision-making in ways that are intended to improve collective impact of aid. According to this definition, much of the formal interaction between agencies would be regarded as information sharing and not coordination and collaboration.

<sup>12</sup> OCHA (2022), '[Humanitarian Response Plan 2022](#)'.

<sup>13</sup> Despite the R-ARCISS and a government of national unity, conflict and violence accounted for over 45% of new displacement movements in 2021 and remained the primary factor in the displacement of 73% of South Sudan's internally displaced people at the end of 2021. See IDMC (2021), '[South Sudan: Country Information](#)'.

<sup>14</sup> Sphere Association (2018), '[The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response](#)', Fourth Edition (Geneva: Sphere), pp.30-38.

humanitarians and peacebuilders can mitigate these trade-offs more effectively and tap into the ‘best of both worlds’ that the aid sector has to offer.

First, primarily humanitarian teams are reluctant to lead on addressing drivers of conflict where they perceive that doing so does not align with the humanitarian principles of neutrality or impartiality.<sup>15</sup> In such cases, humanitarians could coordinate with peacebuilders who have a complementary mandate and fewer restrictions to work on more sensitive issues.

Second, each sector tends to employ staff with the specialist knowledge and skills needed to deliver programmes in these sectors. For example, humanitarian programmes tend to employ more staff with technical skill sets (e.g., engineers, logisticians, health workers) and peacebuilding programmes tend to recruit more staff that have more experience in community engagement, facilitation, negotiation, working in solidarity with civil society, and supporting social change processes.

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**“It’s not possible to put a barrier between humanitarian response and peacebuilding. Working on either one in isolation will not work because they are interrelated.”**

*Director,  
South Sudanese NGO*

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Third, organisations delivering humanitarian responses tend to have organisational systems that allow them to deliver goods and services rapidly and at scale to respond to humanitarian needs. This means that donors expect a more structured and planned approach to procurement, logistics and management to ensure goods and services are located at the right place at the right time. By contrast, peacebuilding programmes tend to be much smaller in terms of scale and coverage, in most cases with a focus on facilitating processes to promote non-violent relationships rather than delivering goods and services. As a result, donors are more willing to accept a more adaptive approach that allows peacebuilders to respond more flexibly and strategically to emerging risks and opportunities.

Fourth, humanitarians and peacebuilders tend to have a different relationship with communities. Some humanitarians use a more ‘transactional’ approach whereby community engagement is structured mainly around the provision of goods and services according to minimum standards. By contrast, many peacebuilders take a more ‘exploratory’ approach where engagement is more iterative and based on community priorities over the long-term.

## **Unfulfilled potential**

However, the history of aid in South Sudan demonstrates that institutional silos have failed to integrate humanitarian and peacebuilding perspectives and weakened the overall effectiveness and sustainability of aid programming.

In practice, there has been a ‘geographic mismatch’ between areas with ongoing violence and emergency humanitarian response (e.g., Jonglei/GPAA, southern Unity, and Upper Nile States) and more stable areas where programming has sought to address longer-term drivers of humanitarian need, including peacebuilding (e.g., Rumbek, Torit, Wau, Yambio). This blind spot in the aid sector’s approach has deep roots and a potentially significant cumulative impact. For example, Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) involved simultaneous ‘negotiated access’ to deliver humanitarian assistance (and, later, community-driven development and peacebuilding) to areas controlled by the Government of Sudan, SPLM/A and SSIM/A in the 1990s, but left parts of Unity State and Upper Nile State controlled

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<sup>15</sup> OCHA defines the humanitarian principle of neutrality as follows: “Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature”. It defines the principle of impartiality as: “Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinction on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions”. See OCHA (2011), [‘OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles’](#).

by other militia groups outside of the OLS framework.<sup>16</sup> The deliberate denial of flight access was also used to ‘punish’ more rural populations in hard-to-reach areas where opposition factions operated, even when aid continued to flow to government-controlled garrison towns. More recently, this bias is reflected in the focus of ‘resilience’ programming that has sought to bridge humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming in areas considered relatively more stable by international actors. For example, the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PfRR) launched in 2019 had focused efforts on seven candidate partnership areas of Yambio, Torit, Aweil, Wau, Rumbek, Bor and Yei and excludes parts of the country affected by more violence. Likewise nearly half (46%<sup>17</sup>) of beneficiaries of FSL Cluster partners’ resilience programming were located in just two states (Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Warrap) in 2021 despite hosting 18%<sup>18</sup> of South Sudan’s estimated population.<sup>19</sup>

These different approaches to geographic targeting – driven in part by donor strategies<sup>20</sup> – have limited the overlap between the areas where humanitarians and peacebuilders work. At best, this is a missed opportunity for collaboration to address the drivers of humanitarian need in areas that have historically experienced higher levels of violence. At worst, this has reinforced patterns of marginalisation that have driven conflict and increased humanitarian needs over the longer-term. While the presence of peacebuilders alongside humanitarians in these areas would not automatically translate into better programming, more coordination and collaboration might help to address these historical patterns that have contributed to feelings of marginalisation and violent conflict.

There is often also a ‘time lag’ between emergency humanitarian response and peacebuilding initiatives. While humanitarians are the first responders in emergency situations, peacebuilders often lack the operational infrastructure to sustain a presence across all areas and, where they are not already present, arrive too late to prevent (re)escalation of violence or inform humanitarian decision-making at critical junctures. The lack of involvement of peacebuilding perspectives in the planning for

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**“The danger is that when humanitarians and peacebuilders work alone, they may not achieve the common goal that the communities want.”**

*South Sudanese Aid Professional,  
Multi-mandate INGO*

**“I’ve never had a community engagement [in South Sudan] where people haven’t effectively said ‘get your act together’.”**

*International Aid Professional,  
with experience working for humanitarian and  
peacebuilding INGOs and UN agencies.*

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emergency response can leave humanitarians taking a ‘conflict-blind’ approach whereby aid can be manipulated and serve to reinforce drivers of conflict, as well as miss opportunities for humanitarian response activities to contribute to social cohesion. This has led to the critique that technocratic approaches to addressing humanitarian need – such as the ‘peace through development’ approach taken by the Area Rehabilitation Schemes in the 1990s – are “complicit in the dynamics of the war”<sup>21</sup> and negotiation of access under OLS as being the “programmatically expression of the acceptance of continuing violence”.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Maxwell, D., Santschi, M., and Gordon, R. (2014), ‘[Looking back to look ahead? Reviewing lessons from Operation Lifeline Sudan and past humanitarian operations in South Sudan](#)’, SLRC WP 24, (London: ODI).

<sup>17</sup> FSL Cluster (2021), ‘2021 Resilience Activities in South Sudan’. As of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021.

<sup>18</sup> OCHA (2022), ‘[South Sudan administrative level 0-2 2022 sex and age disaggregated population estimates](#)’.

<sup>19</sup> Conversely, 13% of beneficiaries of FSL Cluster partners’ resilience programming activities were estimated to be located in the three states of Unity, Jonglei/GPAA and Upper Nile in 2021, despite their persistently high food insecurity classifications and being host to 38% of the estimated population of South Sudan (same sources).

<sup>20</sup> Regardless of the *actual* distributive impact of aid, the *perception* that decisions by some donors have prioritised peacebuilding and developmental support towards more ‘stable’ areas populated mostly by Dinka and various Equatorian communities following the signature of the R-ARCISS in 2018 have led to accusations of ethnic favouritism in South Sudan that have driven tensions and frustration towards donor governments.

<sup>21</sup> Bradbury, M. et al. (2006), ‘[Local Peace Processes in Sudan: A Baseline Study](#)’ (London: RVI), p.64.

<sup>22</sup> Bradbury, M. et al. (2000), ‘[The ‘Agreement on Ground Rules’ in South Sudan](#)’, in ‘The Politics of Principle: The Principles of Humanitarian Action in Practice’ (London: Overseas Development Institute), p.30

Finally, humanitarians and peacebuilders develop parallel and frequently uncoordinated mechanisms to engage communities in consultation, decision-making and project oversight. This feeds into a wider pattern of duplication that places an increased burden on communities, fuels competition between programmes to draw on communities' time and networks, and ultimately drives frustration towards the international community. This inter-agency competition, which even happens *within* the humanitarian community, also sends an implicit message that transparency and cooperation are not important values to aid actors. Engagement according to sectoral priorities (food, water, shelter, security) also risks blind spots when communities articulate priorities that do not fit neatly within respective 'sectors'. Stronger coordination and collaboration has potential to promote more effective programming, reduce the risk of doing harm done through community engagement and foster stronger downwards 'accountability to affected populations' (AAP).<sup>23</sup>

## Lessons about coordination and collaboration

New policy frameworks, such as the Peace Promise<sup>24</sup>, signed in 2016, and donor commitments to operationalise the Triple/HDP Nexus, provide an explicit mandate to address these weaknesses and foster closer collaboration. However, no respondents involved in this paper described the relationship between humanitarian and peacebuilding communities as positive. Instead, it was mostly characterised by a lack of trust, mutual misunderstanding, or indifference. Despite this, positive examples of coordination and collaboration in South Sudan have been identified, and emerging lessons are outlined below.

### 1. The humanitarian principles are not necessarily a barrier to coordination and collaboration with peacebuilders in South Sudan.

There are divergent views within the humanitarian community on whether and how the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence are either an enabler or obstacle to collaboration with peacebuilders in South Sudan. On the one hand, some respondents emphasised the importance of neutrality and impartiality in preserving humanitarian space and access. They see active engagement with peacebuilding actors as potentially compromising the principles of neutrality by engaging in "controversies of a political...nature"<sup>25</sup> or independence by subsuming humanitarian objectives under other objectives such as statebuilding or civil society activism. Others highlight the risks that greater coordination and collaboration with peacebuilders poses to the substantive principle of impartiality ("humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone"). They argue that engagement on issues relating to conflict risks diverting scarce resources away from those most in need or providing assistance based on other criteria, such as equity and inclusion. This was reported as a particular consideration for donor staff managing humanitarian portfolios looking to prioritise shrinking budgets and maximise 'lives saved' as part of value-for-money assessments.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> CSRF (2020), '[Lost in Translation: The interaction between international humanitarian aid and South Sudanese accountability systems](#)' (Juba: Saferworld).

<sup>24</sup> ReliefWeb (2016) '[The Peace Promise: Commitments to more effective synergies among peace, humanitarian and development actions in complex humanitarian situations](#)'. This was signed by UN agencies and some NGOs.

<sup>25</sup> OCHA (2011), '[OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles](#)'.

<sup>26</sup> Distinctions between different types of principles have helped some humanitarians to ensure compliance with humanitarian principles when working on the Triple/HDP Nexus. For example, Jean Pictet described neutrality and independence as 'derived' principles that have "have no intrinsic moral value" and are intended as tools to build trust of stakeholders to create humanitarian space to deliver on the 'substantive' principles of humanity and impartiality. Similarly, Marc DuBois describes 'humanity' as the central purpose of humanitarian action, in contrast to other principles that constitute an 'ethic' (impartiality) or 'operational requirements' (neutrality and independence). These distinctions provide a framework to navigate potential trade-offs, to identify common ground with development and peacebuilding actors, and to better understand how the operationalisation of the principles – and scope for collaboration – may differ between contexts. For more, see: Labbé, J. and Daudin, P. (2016) '[Applying the humanitarian principles: Reflecting on the experience of the International Committee of the](#)

On the other hand, a few considerations specific to South Sudan could mitigate these concerns. First, humanitarian aid has never been entirely neutral in South Sudan, as is the case in any fragile, conflict-affected environment. As highlighted by the OLS experience above, the need to work with government authorities, armed groups, and community leaders to secure safe access and gain relevant permits has shaped where aid is delivered, to whom and how over many decades. These patterns have in turn affected power and conflict dynamics through their interaction with the economy, society, and politics. The reality of the South Sudan context means that “there are better or worse options...but no perfect options”<sup>27</sup> and navigating this complexity in pursuit of humanitarian principles requires an intentionally conflict-sensitive, not conflict-blind, approach. Decisions on whether and how to work with peacebuilders should consider and weigh the perceived risks to neutrality against the potential benefits of a stronger understanding of conflict dynamics – at national, sub-national, and local levels – to facilitate a more nuanced and contextualised approach when applying humanitarian and protection principles. This can help to foster a more conducive operating environment for delivering humanitarian aid in the longer-term.

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**“I have never worked with an organisation that is 100% humanitarian. We have always tried to organise around people and question power dynamics.”**

*Director,  
 Humanitarian INGO*

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Second, many organisations have long recognised the need to address violent conflict, which is a driver of humanitarian needs in South Sudan, and as a result developed parallel portfolios delivering emergency assistance and contributions to peace. For example, many multi-mandate organisations with humanitarian programmes in South Sudan also have global objectives such as “nurturing peaceful and just societies”, to “achieve social justice”, and “fighting extreme inequality”.<sup>28</sup> Often, the community-based approaches taken by some humanitarian teams seek to challenge patterns of power and vulnerability at the grassroots level to ensure they ‘leave no one behind’. However, such work by multi-mandates usually focuses on addressing so-called ‘localised’ conflicts within and between communities (often framed around ‘social cohesion’) to avoid drawing the attention of politicians and becoming associated with more overtly political conflicts that involve competition for state power and resources. This highlights both the opportunities and limitations faced by multi-mandate organisations as they seek to develop programmes designed to contribute to peace that are in line with the humanitarian principles. In some cases, this means that even though they have their own teams working on peacebuilding or social cohesion, multi-mandate organisations should consider working with peacebuilding organisations who often have a higher risk appetite to undertake work seen as potentially more ‘political’ (e.g. mediation, truth-telling or advocacy) to avoid jeopardising their access.

Third, there is also more common ground between the values and principles of humanitarians and peacebuilders than aid professionals in South Sudan often assume. For example, several peacebuilders also emphasised the centrality of humanitarian principles in effective peacebuilding work, and the principles of humanity, neutrality and independence were seen as necessary foundations for building trust across divided communities as part of peacebuilding work. Peacebuilders could do a better job of articulating these shared principles (and any potential differences) when working with humanitarians to strengthen trust and collaboration.

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[Red Cross](#), in *International Review of the Red Cross*, 97, pp.183-210; and DuBois, M. (2020) [The Triple Nexus – Threat or Opportunity for the Humanitarian Principles?](#) (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Action).

<sup>27</sup> Maxwell, D., Santschi, M., and Gordon, R. (2014), ‘[Looking back to look ahead? Reviewing lessons from Operation Lifeline Sudan and past humanitarian operations in South Sudan](#)’, (SLRC WP 24, London: ODI), p.12.

<sup>28</sup> In order of reference see: Catholic Relief Services (2021), [Mission Statement](#); CARE (2021), [About Us](#); DanChurchAid (2021), [Goals and Strategy](#).

**2. Community voices and priorities provide an ‘anchor’ around which humanitarians and peacebuilders can collaborate in ways that reconcile with humanitarian principles.**

Both humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors have long recognised the importance of participatory approaches in ensuring aid is more responsive to community concerns and priorities and appropriate for a given context. Collaboration between these two has potential to reduce duplication, place community voices at the centre of the aid sector’s planning processes and promote greater downwards accountability towards communities in South Sudan.

**People-centred approaches to coordination and collaboration**

Linking to existing customary mechanisms:

Negotiations and compensation agreements between the Misseriya/Rezeigat and Malual Dinka to manage the peaceful migration of the Misseriya/Rezeiga with their cattle through parts of Northern Bahr el Ghazal (NBeG) date back to the colonial period. A recent initiative is the NBeG Peace Actors Cluster (PAC), coordinated by the Regional Peace Coordinator (affiliated with the NBeG Government), which humanitarian and peacebuilding organisations have participated in. This initiative provided logistical and technical support to the customary pre-migration and exit/post-migration conferences. Through this collaboration, agencies responded to community priorities around the spread of disease or the unexpected movement of cattle.

Facilitating spaces and processes for communities to inform aid decisions:

Dialogues facilitated by the Peacebuilding Opportunities Fund (POF) in early 2021 led to representatives from the Dinka Bor, Lou Nuer and Murle communities agreeing a range of actions to help strengthen inter-communal trust and address needs relating to safety and security.<sup>29</sup> These resolutions informed the Reconciliation, Stabilization, and Resilience Trust Fund (RSRTF)’s new programme in Jonglei. Community members reported that more child abductees were returned in the six months following these dialogues than in the past 10 years.

In practice, humanitarian needs and vulnerability assessments are usually carried out based on pre-defined criteria to identify gaps in basic needs according to sectors (e.g., food, water, shelter, health). This sector-based approach can limit communities’ ability to articulate and prioritise their needs *as they define them* and becomes a problem when – as is often the case in South Sudan – communities report their safety and security as priority needs. While protection and community-based humanitarian programming has potential to contribute towards responding to such needs, these can fall short by overlooking potential threats that come from outside the community and require a more holistic and preventive approach to peace.

At the same time, peacebuilding teams frequently lack the resources and technical expertise to address the material conditions that underpin safety and security. International peacebuilders argue that this ‘no resource’ approach is a strength since it enables them to listen more attentively to communities. They also argue that this enables them to navigate community conflicts without being seen to ‘favour’ one community by distributing resources and are not seen as targets in communities’ efforts to extract more resources from the aid community. However, there are undoubtedly limitations to this approach when divided communities agree that they require resources, goods or services, or technical expertise to address material drivers of conflict. Some community leaders also reportedly express frustration with being asked to engage in peacebuilding before more immediate, basic needs are addressed, as reflected in the quote to the left.

“Community members say, ‘We can’t eat peace’.”

Chief of Party,  
Multi-mandate INGO

<sup>29</sup> Peace Canal (2021), [Inter-communal peace governance in Jonglei and the GPAA](#), 26 October 2021.



### **3. Greater coordination and collaboration between humanitarians and peacebuilders can unlock ‘peace dividends’ that incentivise reductions in violence, but doing so effectively requires a strong understanding of local conflict and community dynamics to avoid doing harm.**

Several respondents framed the previous point in terms of the potential for humanitarian (and development) aid to provide ‘peace dividends’ that respond to local communities’ priorities and encourage them to adopt more peaceful behaviours. For example, communities in Jonglei/GPAA called for the rehabilitation of markets, construction of roads and creation of shared boarding schools to facilitate greater interaction between divided Bor Dinka, Lou Nuer and Murle communities as part of a local peace agreement negotiated in 2021. Some humanitarians in South Sudan also piloted negotiation of inter-communal agreements to cease hostilities and allow for secure humanitarian access by making the distribution of food and services conditional on *all* communities’ compliance with the agreements. The logic is that these ‘hard’ investments – whether humanitarian or developmental – can create incentives for peaceful behaviours that support peacebuilding and address longer-term drivers of humanitarian needs and conflict.

However, it cannot be assumed that humanitarian (or development) activities will automatically generate ‘peace dividends’. One of the problems frequently reported by both the humanitarians and peacebuilders is that there are often missed opportunities to use humanitarian and development assistance to bring together divided communities or connect parallel processes of community engagement and intercommunal dialogues in South Sudan. For these activities to be mutually reinforcing, there needs to be more intentional coordination and collaboration between humanitarians and peacebuilders to design and adapt their respective activities, so they tap into these opportunities and are more responsive to communities’ own priorities.

At the same time, a small number of international respondents with significant experience of South Sudan raised caution about the logic of ‘peace dividends’. They expressed concern that the provision of goods and services in exchange for participation in a peace process or adopting peaceful behaviours risks both compromising the primary objectives of goods and services and presents perverse incentives. In the extreme case, they feared that the logic would encourage ‘spoiler behaviour’ whereby some community leaders would effectively blackmail the aid community by encouraging or threatening violence in one area to extract concessions from the aid community to provide more goods and services. On the flip side, they might withdraw their support for peace processes the moment that goods or services are no longer provided.

While no specific examples of this dynamic were presented, these respondents did note the relatively weak ability of international aid professionals to understand what is a complex context, correctly identify conflict dynamics and address them appropriately. This is in part because South Sudanese politicians and community leaders have become adept at negotiating and extracting resources from the aid system, having engaged with it for more than thirty years. The success of a ‘peace dividends’ approach depends on maintaining strong local relationships that enables a robust and up-to-date understanding of both conflict and community dynamics.

### **4. Many South Sudanese organisations already straddle the humanitarian and peacebuilding silos and could support coordination and collaboration among international humanitarians’ and peacebuilders’.**

South Sudanese organisations – whether NGOs, community-based organisations, or church groups – have long recognised the potential opportunities of linking humanitarian and peacebuilding activities to maximise the aid sector’s collective contribution to peace. South Sudanese respondents and organisations frequently described their mandate in terms of “helping communities” or “saving lives” and working more flexibly across humanitarian and peacebuilding programming to achieve this goal. A more contextualised understanding of the interplay between humanitarian needs and conflict, greater use of

community-driven approaches, and stronger faith-based identities are among the reasons why national organisations are often more aware of these linkages and seek to work across them.<sup>30, 31</sup>

Respondents gave several examples of initiatives they would pursue that require coordination and collaboration across sectors. The organisation of cultural, sporting, and other trust-building activities around food distributions – when humanitarians have already mobilised large groups of people – was one such example of how to contribute to peace. Others included involving humanitarians in the work of Peace Committees to address community concerns around safety and security, leveraging local organisation’s knowledge of how to work sensitively with armed groups to improve access, and using psychosocial support and trauma-healing to address emotional drivers or consequences of conflict.

However, South Sudanese organisations face obstacles to delivering on such approaches. Sometimes, international humanitarians are simply not aware of their national partners’ expertise and concurrent programming in the peacebuilding sector. While this may in part be due to lack of knowledge, it may also be due to the fact South Sudanese organisations do not advertise this expertise, as they often do not see it as valued by the wider sector. Indeed, local aid organisations’ attempts to bridge the silos in a more structured way are often rebuffed by an aid sector that prioritises scarce resources based on a narrow definition of ‘basic needs’ that neglects the inclusion of safety as a basic need. Respondents gave examples where they had submitted proposals to integrate peacebuilding approaches into the delivery of humanitarian aid (especially protection programming) but had these sent back with instructions to remove the peacebuilding elements or just rejected entirely.

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**“Lots of local partners are already doing peacebuilding, so we just need to leverage this.”**

*Country Director,  
Multi-mandate INGO*

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While all organisations are largely dependent on competitive funding streams, South Sudanese organisations are particularly affected. They have less direct access to donors and are largely dependent on mechanisms, such as the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund or specific agency programmes, that often have narrow objectives and strict funding criteria that regard peacebuilding activities as ineligible. These funding silos force many South Sudanese organisations to ‘follow the (usually humanitarian) money’ and deliver short-term projects without longer-term, resourced strategy that would allow them to work across the silos. By providing more core/flexible funding and ensuring inclusion of South Sudanese voices in analysis and planning processes, the localisation agenda has potential to empower South Sudanese organisations and ensure their peacebuilding experience and skills can inform humanitarian action.<sup>32, 33</sup>

Some international humanitarians resist this shift on the grounds that doing so would undermine their efforts to socialise national organisations into a ‘strict’ interpretation of humanitarian principles. However, this argument overlooks the opportunities that bridging humanitarian and peacebuilding perspectives would bring to enrich the understanding, and interpretation, of the humanitarian principles. For example, such interaction could help not only national organisations but also INGOs, UN

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<sup>30</sup> Wilkinson, O., de Wolf, F. and Alier, M. (2019), [The Triple Nexus and Local Faith Actors in South Sudan: Findings from Primary Research](#) (Copenhagen: DanChurchAid).

<sup>31</sup> A more cynical interpretation expressed by some respondents characterises the tendency of South Sudanese organisations to work across sectors as a practical necessity to pursue funding opportunities wherever they exist, given the difficulties they face in covering overheads through more specialised funding and the scarcity of funding opportunities to maintain a physical presence in a given area, rather than a strategic choice.

<sup>32</sup> Robinson, A. and CSRF (2021), [Localisation and Conflict Sensitivity: Lessons on good practice from South Sudan](#) (Juba: Saferworld).

<sup>33</sup> CARE et al. (2019), [Accelerating Localisation Through Partnerships: Recommendations for operational practices that strengthen the leadership of national and local actors in partnership-based humanitarian action in South Sudan](#).

agencies and donors to acknowledge, recognise and mitigate the biases that, when left unaddressed, threaten the neutrality and impartiality of all aid professionals.

**5. Initiatives requiring coordination and collaboration must be realistic about the investments of time, resources and leadership required to ensure the benefits outweigh the costs.**

Decisions about when, how, and where humanitarian and peacebuilders should coordinate and collaborate must consider the financial and non-financial costs of such efforts. These costs can be particularly significant when coordinating across large consortia and different types of organisations – especially when involving government authorities or communities – since it takes time to overcome the inevitable challenges and miscommunications that arise from the different views, institutional interests and social norms of participants. In particularly complex cases, such as the RSRTF, this can require multiple dedicated coordinators.

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**“Your time can easily be drained by just attending coordination meetings and that would leave no time to actually work.”**

*South Sudanese Aid Professional,  
 Peacebuilding Organisation*

**“Coordination is good as a *response* to a problem, not as a defined solution.”**

*Programme Manager,  
 Peacebuilding Organisation*

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This concern was reflected in different ways among those consulted for this paper. On the one hand, peacebuilders were more concerned with the limited resources they have to coordinate or collaborate with other actors (explored in more detail under lesson six). On the other hand, humanitarians expressed frustration and ‘coordination fatigue’ given their existing engagement in the humanitarian cluster system and other working groups.

A guiding principle was identified by one respondent who described coordination as good when it responds to a problem but raised

concerns about the automatic tendency to view it as the solution to everything. The process of defining this shared ‘problem’ is sometimes skipped when designing coordination mechanisms. This concern was raised by multiple respondents who expressed mixed feelings about the drive to institutionalise coordination. Several previous such attempts in South Sudan – including a Social Cohesion Working Group within the Protection Cluster or the Peace Actors Network bringing together peacebuilding NGOs – reportedly struggled to maintain momentum due to a combination of staff turnover, unclear goals, and lack of funding. Any future initiatives would need to weigh the benefits and costs of collaboration and have specific plans to overcome these challenges. There would be value in synthesising lessons from these past initiatives and ongoing spaces that bring together humanitarian and peacebuilding perspectives such as the Durable Solutions Working Group and RSRTF’s Area Reference Groups.

**6. The relative lack of coordination among peacebuilding organisations reduces their visibility and contributes to missed opportunities for collaboration with the wider aid system.**

Many of the respondents working for humanitarian or multi-mandate organisations noted that they did not know which organisations deliver peacebuilding programming in South Sudan. On one hand, the peacebuilding programming of national NGOs that work across the sectors was often ‘invisible’ to humanitarian colleagues for reasons discussed under lesson four above. On the other hand, international peacebuilding NGOs are absent from many of the inter-organisational coordination mechanisms and associated decision-making processes, given that these mechanisms primarily target humanitarian actors. Furthermore, humanitarians are required to advertise their activities and outputs to support effective coordination within the Cluster system, and include their projects/activities in key public documents, such as the Humanitarian Response Plan. Peacebuilders, however, are often deliberately discrete in their work due to issues of confidentiality and to ensure the safety and security of staff, partners, and community members. As a result, peacebuilders often do not announce when

community security assessments have taken place, when dialogues have been concluded or agreements been reached.

However, in many cases this lack of visibility is also explained by the reluctance of peacebuilders to engage proactively in humanitarian coordination structures. Aid professionals with longstanding experience in South Sudan recalled closer integration of peacebuilding voices in inter-organisational spaces – such as the Protection Cluster or NGO Forum – in the past, but that the

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**“Peacebuilders need to do a much better job of reaching out to humanitarians.”**

*South Sudanese Aid Professional, with experience working for humanitarian and peacebuilding INGOs and UN agencies*

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outbreak of the civil war in December 2013 re-focused international organisations’ (including multi-mandates’) attention on responding to urgent humanitarian needs and side-lined peacebuilding voices in the process. The irony of this shift away from peacebuilding at a time of conflict was not lost on these respondents. Not surprisingly, some peacebuilding respondents felt that their voices have not been valued, feel they are viewed as “troublemakers” or “humanitarian police” when they attempted to raise concerns on behalf of communities, and have expressed frustration with (especially UN) multi-mandate organisations who are sometimes perceived as ‘encroaching’ on peacebuilders’ activities. This reflects a degree of ‘territoriality’ on both sides that hinders coordination and collaboration.

At the same time, the peacebuilding sector has no equivalent counterpart to the humanitarian cluster system that encourages coordination at the national and state levels.<sup>34</sup> This absence has limited the visibility of peacebuilding actors and the potential for sharing lessons about how to promote collective impact through more coordination and collaboration – both among peacebuilders and with humanitarians. The latter instead rely on private networks to identify who works where, and this raises the risks of duplication, blind-spots and missed opportunities.

## **7. Having informal relationships, networks and trust between humanitarians and peacebuilders provides a foundation for more formal coordination and collaboration**

A common pattern among cases identified through the learning exercise was the importance of having informal relationships and trust in advance of more formal coordination and collaboration around project objectives or unfolding events. These informal relationships between ‘champions’ in humanitarian or multi-mandate organisations (e.g., conflict sensitivity specialists, context analysts, access advisers) and peacebuilders meant that entry points could be identified, information shared, and actions adapted quickly as part of a collective response.

Such personal relationships can help to overcome one of the biggest barriers to coordination and collaboration – much analysis and information relating to peace and conflict in South Sudan is not shared publicly due to concerns about reputational risk, staff, partner safety, and in some cases, competition over funding. This means that analytical efforts are duplicated, communities are overburdened with consultations, and opportunities for a more coherent overall response are missed. At an inter-organisational level, the incentives for collaboration are low and the costs are high, so the

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**“Opportunities for collaboration emerge organically when people talk and share.”**

*International Aid Professional,  
Hybrid ‘protection-peacebuilding’ INGO*

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personal initiatives of leaders and champions within organisations to trust partners, share information and take a ‘risk tolerant’ (rather than ‘blame averse’) approach has been key to overcoming these obstacles in pursuit of shared objectives.

<sup>34</sup> A few notable exceptions exist at the state level such as the Northern Bahr el Ghazal Peace Actors Cluster, the Jonglei Social Cohesion Working Group (a sub-cluster of the Jonglei Area Reference Group) and the Western Bahr el Ghazal Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Working Group. These provide promising models for more coordination and collaboration among peacebuilders, although they vary in their objectives, attendance, external engagement and level of formality.

Respondents also highlighted how opportunities for collaboration often emerge organically out of such interaction. This helps to nuance the relative merits of institutionalisation – while collaboration should only be pursued “as a response to a problem”, the identification of these problems and successful collaboration in response to them often depends on pre-existing informal relationships, rather than formal mechanisms. The creation of informal spaces for interaction can help to break down silos and build trust, although must be approached in a way that is inclusive in terms of nationality and gender.

#### **8. Donor staff often underestimate their ability to influence patterns of coordination and collaboration.**

Humanitarians, peacebuilders, and those in-between all felt that donors send mixed signals regarding the importance of coordination and collaboration in South Sudan. While donors ‘talk the talk’ of the Triple/HDP Nexus, respondents believed they often refuse to ‘walk the walk’ by rejecting funding to activities intended to bridge these silos or leverage humanitarian programming to contribute to peace on the grounds that they are incompatible with humanitarian principles. This “donor paradox” has been covered in detail elsewhere but is worth reflecting on as an overall constraint shaping interaction between agencies in South Sudan<sup>35</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>36</sup>

For example, donor staff managing humanitarian portfolios are often in principle enthusiastic about more ‘joined-up’ approaches but are reluctant to finance them out of already overstretched funding pots designed to address humanitarian needs. The reluctance of donors to draw on humanitarian funding streams to finance the RSRTF is one example of this; however, South Sudanese organisations that straddle the humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors also expressed frustration with the unwillingness of donors to use humanitarian budgets to finance ‘social cohesion’ activities designed to enhance the impact of humanitarian aid. Instead, organisations must try to integrate approaches through parallel projects that often have different timeframes, staffing, and reporting requirements.

However, respondents also noted the positive roles that donors have played in some cases. For example, donors have accepted more adaptive results frameworks for peacebuilding programming that could be extended to integrated programming that bridges humanitarian and peacebuilding approaches. The willingness of donors to co-fund projects such as the RSRTF also has potential to reduce transaction costs associated with reporting and incentivise collaboration, although they also have potential to concentrate funding in fewer, larger agencies that have capacity to invest significant financial resources to prepare proposals at the expense of diversity and leadership by a wider range of organisations in the aid system. Finally, donors have played an important brokering role by connecting humanitarian and peacebuilding partners working in similar geographic areas and encouraging them to consider potential opportunities for collaboration.

### **Ideas for next steps**

The title of this learning paper poses the provocative question of whether humanitarians and peacebuilders are able to achieve their goals ‘better together’ in South Sudan. The responses to consultations conducted as part of this research highlight the wide range of contrasting opinions between representatives of humanitarian, peacebuilding and multi-mandate teams and organisations. There is significant mutual misunderstanding and scepticism that has deterred coordination and collaboration in the absence of the structural incentives that would encourage it. In this sense, there is a long way to go before the two sectors recognise each other as mutually supportive.

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<sup>35</sup> Quack, M. and Südhoff, R. (2020), [‘The Triple Nexus in South Sudan: Learning from Local Opportunities’](#), October 2020 (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Action).

<sup>36</sup> Redvers, L. and Parker, B. (2019), [‘Searching for the nexus: It’s all about the money.’](#) The New Humanitarian. Special Report. 3 December 2019.

However, there are also positive examples of coordination and collaboration between humanitarians and peacebuilders driven forward by committed individuals that have generated important lessons to inform future programming. Such cases have demonstrated the ways in which each sector has worked as an ‘impact multiplier’ for the other while respecting potential differences in mandates and principles. They are also remarkable for having overcome the day-to-day barriers to collaboration such as high insecurity, logistical constraints, access issues that complicate any attempt to go beyond ‘business-as-usual’ in a context such as South Sudan.

In the meantime, this paper has aimed to frame the overall opportunities and dilemmas associated with working across silos. Many of these are genuinely challenging to resolve and the CSRF does not have all the answers or solutions. What follows are therefore overarching suggestions to stimulate reflection and subsequent discussion on how to apply these lessons to strengthen the collective impact of aid in South Sudan.

#### **On building relationships and mutual understanding:**

- 1. Consider developing a more comprehensive map or overview of programmes and organisations’ physical presence for South Sudan that includes humanitarian, development and peacebuilding.** There is already the ‘3Ws’ product (‘Who does What Where?’) that maps humanitarian organisations and activities. The inclusion of organisations with peacebuilding and development activities in a new ‘3Ws+’ map would give a clearer picture of all operational agencies in South Sudan. This could help improve the visibility of peacebuilders in different areas and connect them with humanitarians for coordination and collaboration purposes.
- 2. Operational agencies and donors consider how to foster more informal spaces in which humanitarians and peacebuilders from international and South Sudanese agencies can build trust, networks, and mutual understanding.** We know that the relationships and networks across sectoral silos have frequently underpinned more effective coordination and collaboration in response to emerging issues, which has in turn helped to fuel a ‘virtuous cycle’ whereby informal relationships and the successes from formal collaboration reinforce each other. One possibility could be to hold voluntary networking events that provide a safe space for humanitarians and peacebuilders to connect and share ideas and experiences. While these would benefit from a degree of informality and flexibility to encourage personal interaction and avoid duplicating formal, project-oriented conversations, they could also benefit from suggested talking points, themes, or regional focuses to facilitate smooth interaction and increase the relevance of such events to participants. Existing plans to pilot more decentralised, area-based management of humanitarian aid in South Sudan could provide an ideal opportunity to foster such informal spaces at the county level.
- 3. Humanitarians and peacebuilders undertake joint reflection on the humanitarian principles and the nuances needed for their application in the South Sudan context.** The purpose of this exercise would be to support new humanitarians to understand the potential for the inappropriate application of these principles to cause unintended harm, provide peacebuilders with an opportunity to communicate shared principles, and build a common understanding of the scope for coordination and collaboration across the sectors in line with these principles.

#### **On understanding the context:**

- 4. Humanitarians and inter-agency bodies (e.g., clusters) more intentionally engage with, learn from and collaborate with South Sudanese organisations, particularly those with peacebuilding experience, during context analysis and response planning processes to enhance conflict sensitivity.** Humanitarian agencies regularly conduct needs and vulnerability assessments, but the guiding questions and templates for these exercises are often too tightly defined to draw on the peacebuilding experience and relationships of NNGO partners. The integration of conflict sensitivity into qualitative assessments and planning processes would encourage NNGO partners to be more forthcoming with their suggestions about how the humanitarian community can adapt

and collaborate to contribute towards peace. This may also require donors or other bodies to provide funding to strengthen the analytical capacity of NNGOs and cover the costs of their participation in assessments and planning processes. This would encourage mutual learning and capacity sharing among NNGOs, INGOs and UN agencies, and mitigate risks of bias on all sides.

- 5. Consider how to balance expertise and disciplines within both humanitarian and peacebuilding teams to facilitate building collective understanding of both the conflict and aid context.** While humanitarian organisations already include staff with backgrounds in social sciences (e.g., anthropology, political science, sociology), sectoral or technical expertise (e.g., health, education, or law) is often prioritised. Having a more balanced representation of skill sets and perspectives across humanitarian teams could support a more holistic understanding of communities as complex and dynamic systems, rather than a consolidation of individual and sectoral ‘needs’. Likewise, larger peacebuilding organisations may benefit from hiring staff with more of a humanitarian background who bring a better understanding of the wider aid system and how to navigate the humanitarian architecture in pursuit of coordination and collaboration.

#### On coordination mechanisms:

- 6. Humanitarians and peacebuilders could explore ways to coordinate community engagement activities to reduce duplication, improve coherence and promote responsiveness to community priorities.** For example, community ‘Protection Committees’ promoting community safety and protection from threats and ‘Peace Committees’ promoting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence may serve similar functions, and often engage with the same individuals. Participation in such committees presents ‘opportunity’ costs for individuals through the time they invest in them, and re-enforces perceptions that the aid sector is not coordinated at the local level. Where more coordinated community engagement has already taken place – such as through inclusion of humanitarians as observers in the Jonglei peace process and follow-up community engagement – the lessons should be documented and shared with the wider aid community. In some cases, joint community engagement also benefits from greater inclusion of local authorities and government officials, who also have a perspective on how programming could be more coordinated, and could advocate with the aid sector on behalf of their communities. The decision on whether and how to include government officials in joint community engagement would need to be taken on a case-by-case basis, based on careful analysis of relations between the government and communities.
- 7. Operational agencies consider establishing coordination mechanisms across humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors at the state and county levels. Such mechanisms should clearly articulate objectives against which progress can be measured and ways-of-working adapted.** There are multiple ongoing initiatives where the inclusion of peacebuilding voices in coordination mechanisms would be valuable – such as area-based programming or planning around returns processes – but they must be guided by realistic objectives around which all members can mobilise. These objectives should be informed by, and preferably work in support of, existing (inter-)community objectives and initiatives.
- 8. Peacebuilders form and donors resource coordination networks at the national and state levels.** While having peacebuilding coordination mechanisms would not necessarily ‘even the playing field’ with humanitarians, such networks would provide an opportunity for peacebuilders to collectively engage with the relative complexity of the humanitarian system, and provide humanitarian organisations with a clearer entry point to explore potential coordination and collaboration. Such networks have been established in the past (e.g., Peace Actors Network) but discontinued due to a combination of an under-resourced secretariat, unclear objectives and weak buy-in from members. Future initiatives should articulate clear, realistic objectives, create a safe space for discussion, and respond to the interest and demand of potential members. The cluster system was established over 15 years ago, and provides peacebuilders with a wealth of well-documented challenges and lessons that they may wish to learn from. Careful consideration would

also need to be given to build on and complement the Peacebuilding Coordination Forum planned by the Ministry of Peacebuilding as well as existing coordination mechanisms at the sub-national level (e.g., Jonglei Social Cohesion Working Group or Western Bahr el-Ghazal Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Working Group).

**On financing and incentives:**

- 9. Donors could pilot funding and programming models that support greater coordination and collaboration between humanitarians and peacebuilders.** This could start by joint consultations with interested aid agencies to understand the specific ways in which funding streams, procurement processes and contracting models present obstacles for coordination, and explore potential solutions to these. On the one hand, these should explore the potential for larger humanitarian budgets to be spent on more integrated activities that promote social cohesion and peace that underpins safe access. On the other hand, these should explore mechanisms for peacebuilders to scale up and down in response to emerging risks (so-called ‘crisis modifiers’ drawing on reserve funding) that would facilitate simultaneous and more coordinated emergency responses with humanitarians.<sup>37</sup> Without this, operational agencies will struggle to sustain and scale collaboration beyond *ad hoc* coordination on issues of shared interest where capacity already exists. This kind of consultation and pilot would likely need to involve stakeholders in donor headquarters with greater oversight and control over funding mechanisms and could be part of a shared pilot across different countries.

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*Feedback, comments or suggestions are welcomed as part of ongoing dialogue and learning around conflict sensitivity and should be sent to [info@csrf-southsudan.org](mailto:info@csrf-southsudan.org).*

<sup>37</sup> Development Initiatives (2019), [Key questions and considerations for donors at the Triple Nexus: Lessons from UK and Sweden](#).