

Towards a conflict-sensitive HDP nexus in South Sudan

A collection of lessons

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The humanitarian, development, and peace (HDP) nexus as an attempt to enable a more coherent and efficient collective response to dynamic and interconnected crises has received increasing prominence in South Sudan. While there are examples of how an HDP nexus can contribute to more effective aid in conflict-affected contexts, its application also carries conflict sensitivity risks. This analysis piece looks at what a conflict-sensitive HDP nexus might mean in the context of South Sudan. This is done by first elaborating on ‘nexus-type’ approaches in South Sudan’s aid history, the learnings of which can be useful for present discussions. Second, the analysis zooms in on three aspects that are perceived as crucial for a conflict-sensitive HDP nexus: rooting the HDP nexus in local understanding, strengthening the peace focus, and engaging meaningfully with communities. Based on these considerations, the paper suggests practical recommendations for aid actors in South Sudan.

Introduction

The term ‘HDP nexus’ (also referred to as ‘triple nexus’)¹ encapsulates a vision where humanitarian, development and peace actors coordinate and collaborate towards shared and integrated outcomes. In this way, they can realise comparative advantages to enable a more coherent, efficient and effective collective response. There has been increasing interest in the usefulness of this approach for South Sudan, which continues to experience a range of interconnected crises and shocks that cannot be addressed in isolation. In order to address the root causes of conflict and vulnerability, there is value in considering how humanitarian, development and peace actors can work together to achieve combined objectives. These include addressing humanitarian needs, supporting resilience and social cohesion, and building long-term capacities and sustainable development.

The rationale behind the HDP nexus appears to resonate with the rationale for conflict sensitivity. Both approaches aim to make aid and international cooperation more effective, collaborative and based on shared objectives. They both compel aid actors² to build strategies and responses focused on the long-term causes of conflict, chronic need and vulnerability. For such approaches to meaningfully achieve their objectives, aid organisations and programming need to be more responsive to local experiences and perspectives, tailored to the specific context, and able to respond to complex and multifaceted systems. For both HDP nexus and conflict-sensitive approaches, it is not enough to institutionalise policies and mainstream tools. Instead, they require a greater culture shift in mind sets and ways of working.

While there are some positive examples, we have also seen that, in reality, operationalising the HDP nexus does not always correspond with the ideal presented in the previous paragraph. This analysis piece explores what a conflict-sensitive HDP nexus might mean in the context of South Sudan. It takes stock of reflections based on recent programmatic experience and historic approaches, including some lessons that have been captured through recent Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF)

¹ The two terms tend to be used interchangeably. For this analysis, we will use ‘HDP nexus’.

² ‘Aid actor’ includes all those involved in the aid response, including donors, multilateral/multinational organisations, international and national non-governmental organisations (I/NNGOs), and humanitarian, development and peacebuilding practitioners.

analysis, roundtables, workshops and surveys. It contextualises different conflict sensitivity risks and opportunities for the HDP nexus in South Sudan by looking at past ‘nexus-type’ thinking in South Sudan’s aid history. It then goes on to specifically focus on aspects such as rooting the HDP nexus in local understanding, strengthening the peace focus, and engaging meaningfully with communities.³ With this, the aim of the piece is to contribute to a better understanding and more effective operationalisation of the HDP nexus approach in South Sudan and beyond.

Building on what is already there: a history of ‘nexus-type’ thinking within the aid sector in South Sudan

Interest in the HDP nexus builds on previous initiatives and thinking both at the global policy level and in South Sudan. Different areas of focus have fluctuated over the years of aid response in South Sudan, but in many ways, efforts to encourage greater connectedness across humanitarian, development and peace actors are not new. In fact, thinking across elements of the nexus has been part of shifting aid approaches throughout decades of response and international presence in South Sudan, although they might not have been framed this way or employed in a deliberate ‘HDP nexus strategy’. Such experience may provide useful lessons, enabling attempts to operationalise an HDP nexus approach in order to build on what may already exist, learn from past practice and assumptions, and be better tailored to the context.

The following section aims at providing an overview on important steps in South Sudan’s aid history of the last two decades, from a HDP nexus perspective. This overview is by no means exhaustive; however, it seeks to demonstrate that lessons from previous changing attitudes and approaches within the aid system can offer crucial insights.

History: OLS, CPA and the civil war in South Sudan

- **Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), 1989–2005:** OLS has been subject to much analysis and criticism of its deficiencies.⁴ However, as the first large-scale humanitarian relief effort of its kind, and one that linked the relief efforts with broader peacemaking, it also provided valuable lessons on the potential for more integrated approaches. OLS was based on an access agreement between the warring parties that required continuous diplomacy and negotiations to maintain and brought about de facto ceasefires via ‘corridors of tranquility’. It arguably resulted in some peace outcomes, even if coincidental or as a by-product in some cases. Some assert that “for much of the 1990s, as political negotiations faltered, OLS access negotiations became one of the few conduits for formal dialogue between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A)”.⁵ OLS also often forced aid actors to coordinate and work together more, opening up new space for challenging debates around the humanitarian principles and peace.⁶ From 1993, it expanded to include other development-related activities (at the time phrased as ‘moving along the relief to development continuum’),⁷ alongside a global push towards ‘Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development’ (LRRD).⁸ Similar strategies were also applied in the Nuba Mountains in 2002 and in Darfur in 2004.
- **The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), 2005–2011:** During the CPA years, a more developmental statebuilding approach to international assistance in South Sudan was

³ Note that the CSRF has also published a complementary piece on how to strengthen collective community engagement in the HDP nexus, including lessons and gaps in existing approaches.

⁴ Duffield M, et al. (2000), ‘[Sudan: Unintended consequences of humanitarian assistance](#)’.

⁵ Rift Valley Institute (2006), ‘[Local Peace Processes in South Sudan: A Baseline Study](#)’, p26.

⁶ Maxwell D, Santschi M, Gordon R (2014), ‘[Looking back to look ahead? Reviewing key lessons from Operation Lifeline Sudan and past humanitarian operations in South Sudan](#)’, Feinstein International Center.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

adopted alongside the ongoing humanitarian response. The logic behind the approach was that of the ‘peace dividend’, implying that development was not only a reward for peace but that to fail to deliver a peace dividend would lead to conflict. The theory that ‘all development contributes to conflict prevention and peacebuilding’ was prevalent.⁹ However, this approach overlooked the highly contextual nature of statebuilding processes and the complexity of governance structures and authority. This presented risks that assistance might feed into dynamics and legitimise groups that contributed to conflict.¹⁰ However, if integrated approaches and coordination are based on a good understanding of the local context and conflict dynamics, then there may be strong potential for collaboration across humanitarian, development and peace actors to unlock peace dividends.

- **Civil war in 2013:** The civil war, which began in December 2013, caused the aid system to rapidly shift its approach. Escalating humanitarian needs coupled with a loss of trust in political leaders, along with increased scrutiny of the role of international assistance in relation to the state, led to a rapid funding shift towards emergency response. Surprise at the speed of South Sudan’s collapse and discomfort at the relationship between international engagement and political groups led to a period of soul-searching among donors and the aid community. It also resulted in a renewed interest in conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity. Aid strategies were completely overhauled to reflect the new reality on the ground. Meanwhile, funding portfolios shifted away from long-term development engagements, particularly those with government institutions.¹¹ Basic service delivery was to some degree maintained (e.g., the Health Pooled Fund¹², some support for basic education) or integrated into humanitarian framing; however, resources were significantly reduced for development programmes and many were cut, minimised or paused.¹³ Although some support for local and subnational peacebuilding continued, a focus on high-level political actors and the national peace process dominated. The scramble to adapt and focus on the high-level peace process meant that there was less deliberation on comprehensive strategies for linking peace across geographic levels, and limited strategic thinking on how humanitarian and development aid could support the transition from war to peace.
- **The aid context since R-ARCSS:** While political developments since the peace process leading to the revitalised peace agreement in 2018 (R-ARCSS – Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan) have reduced conflict between the main groups, levels of insecurity remain high across the country. In many communities improvements in humanitarian and development needs remain elusive. Humanitarian needs have worsened,¹⁴ economic decline and overlapping crises have compounded growing poverty, while localised, subnational and gender-based violence has increased in parts of the country.¹⁵ There has been a strong interest in resilience programming based on how these approaches can help make people less vulnerable to combined shocks and stresses, including the impact of conflict.¹⁶ This has been further driven by a growing awareness of the impacts of climate change in South Sudan. Interest in rethinking aid approaches has been motivated

⁹ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2010), [‘Aiding the Peace: A Multi-donor Evaluation of Support to Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities in Southern Sudan 2005-2010’](#).

¹⁰ See, for example, Lachner W (2012), ‘South Sudan: [International State-Building and its Limit](#)’. The state has not been working according to Western notions and expectations of statehood, for instance, in terms of service delivery or participatory approaches. The state is associated by some powerful members of the elite as a source of power and resources.

¹¹ Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) (2020), [‘Blind Sides and Soft Spots – An Evaluation of Norway’s Aid Engagement in South Sudan’](#).

¹² See Health Pooled Fund [website](#)

¹³ Herbert S (2019), [‘Lessons from stabilisation, statebuilding, and development programming in South Sudan’](#).

¹⁴ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2023) [‘South Sudan Humanitarian Overview 2023 \(November 2022\)’](#).

¹⁵ Carver F (2017), [‘A “call to peacebuilding”: rethinking humanitarian and development activity in South Sudan’](#), *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine* 68.

¹⁶ CSRF South Sudan (2021), [‘Making or Breaking Silos? Resilience programming in South Sudan’](#).

by an increased recognition of the need for flexibility. This includes strategies and approaches that are better able to respond to the complexity of South Sudan’s context, a challenging and risky operating environment, and shifting global debates around aid reform. Rethinking aid discussions have also helped to pave the way for greater interest in opportunities to link humanitarian, development and peacebuilding approaches. For example, some NGOs now have country-specific HDP nexus strategies.

Other more recent developments have highlighted a growing interest in HDP nexus:

- Peer-2-Peer mission:** The Peer-2-Peer (P2P) Support project carried out a mission on behalf of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) early in 2022. The aim was to help ‘inform and shape optimised mechanisms, strategies and operational approaches for the current and evolving context, identifying ways to strengthen the overall humanitarian response’¹⁷ in South Sudan. Some of the recommendations made through this process included: the creation of an Integrated Office for the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG), the Resident Coordinator (RC) and the HC, which will include a Risk Management Unit to ‘ensure a collective platform for analysis at national, state and area-levels’;¹⁸ the development of an ‘actionable short to medium term triple nexus strategy, including a GoSS [Government of South Sudan] engagement strategy’;¹⁹ and the call to use the South Sudan Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience Trust Fund (RSRTF) to practically implement HDP nexus programmes.²⁰ The recommendations represented a clear push to strengthen HDP nexus approaches in South Sudan. In line with this, as well as the R-NDS (see below), the UN Country Team has made the HDP nexus a central principle for the development of its 2023–2025 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and is currently further developing strategies to strengthen nexus-type programming, including via the Partnership for Peace, Recovery and Resilience (PfPRR). The implementation of recommendations of the P2P mission alongside the outcome of recent efforts towards HDP nexus approaches will need to be monitored to assess whether they result in progress towards the desired objectives of applied HDP nexus approaches.
- Revised National Development Strategy (R-NDS):** Responding to this growing awareness, the Government of South Sudan integrated the HDP nexus as a key principle of its Revised National Development Strategy (R-NDS)²¹ in 2021, which is designed to support the R-ARCSS and draws on lessons from the previously implemented Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PfRR).²² As well as seeing peace as a cross-cutting condition to address the country’s humanitarian and development challenges in a sustainable way, the government has committed to supporting the HDP nexus in more practical ways. For instance, according to the R-NDS, the Ministry of Finance and Planning and the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs will ‘lead joint assessments in collaboration with development partners to map the country in terms of development and humanitarian, peace and nexus zones’. They will also support ‘joint planning to define indicators for collective outcomes, harness comparative advantages and gradually build local coordination and leadership capacities’.²³

This overview, which is by no means exhaustive, has shown how different elements of approaches that resonate with HDP nexus thinking have been part of discussions and approaches on international cooperation in South Sudan for decades, and also some examples of how they are being applied

¹⁷ Peer-2-Peer Support and Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2022), ‘[IASC Peer-2-Peer Project Mission Report South Sudan](#)’.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Republic of South Sudan and UNDP (2021), [Revised National Development Strategy 2021–2024: Consolidate peace and stabilize the economy](#) (R-NDS).

²² The Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PfRR) became the PfPRR in 2022 (Partnership for Peace, Resilience and Recovery).

²³ R-NDS op. cit. footnote 21, p 48.

today. When looking closer at the diverse experiences of individuals and programmes, especially at the local level, it becomes evident that there are and have been many different approaches by international and national aid organisations in South Sudan that have at their core similar elements and principles to an HDP nexus approach, though they may not be explicitly labelled as such. These include approaches by international and national/local (faith) groups, collaborations across dual pillars (for example, linking conflict prevention with resilience or economic interest with peace), multi-partner cooperation across three pillars (RSRTF or the PfPRR), as well as ad hoc collaboration between organisations of the three pillars. A survey to map existing programming and groups associated with the HDP nexus in South Sudan was conducted by the CSRF and the UN Resident Coordinator Office (UN RCO) between July and October 2022.²⁴ It found 109 out of 127 registered projects that were identified as adopting a ‘nexus’ approach (i.e., 86 per cent) included elements of at least two of the three pillars, while only 46 (36 per cent) described themselves as having humanitarian, development, and peace elements. Although the survey did not entail a representative sample, these results nevertheless indicate that there are many lessons to be learnt from actors that already work along the nexus. A select list of examples of existing and historic approaches, including reflections, can be found in the Annex to this paper.

The HDP nexus: a top-down policy or an opportunity for locally-led responses?

The HDP nexus has great potential to enable programmes to be designed more around the strengths of national and local aid actors and groups if it is operationalised as a bottom-up approach to respond to local needs more effectively.²⁵ However, so far, the HDP nexus has often been perceived as a top-down policy, primarily operationalised as a framework at the global and national policy levels and focused on structural and operational solutions, such as improving coordination across the three sectors and promoting new funding models. The potential for greater systemic shifts in mindset and working cultures across the aid system has yet to be realised.²⁶

If the HDP nexus is interpreted solely as a technical tool it risks ignoring the political or conflict dynamics in contexts (particularly at the subnational and local levels) and the power dynamics between international and local actors (and how they interact with marginalised groups, e.g., women, ethnic and religious minority groups). If the potential for acknowledging and addressing these dynamics is not tapped into, the HDP nexus may become another ‘tick box’ exercise on implementing partners, asking them to understand what the international community means by ‘HDP nexus’, and adhere to and deliver against new approaches and tools. Local aid actors and groups may act as a source of information for context analyses or as implementing partners without actually receiving more decision-making power in programming and strategies.

Furthermore, working across silos and being flexible and adaptive to changing local needs only works if donors and international aid actors (including UN agencies and INGOs) ‘walk the talk’, understand the case for and move towards a longer-term vision and funding structure, and increase their flexibility. Otherwise, the approach could put national and local organisations under increasing pressure to deliver on an idea, the HDP nexus, without adequate technical and financial support. Consequently, the HDP nexus could inadvertently reinforce long-standing inequalities in the aid sector, missing opportunities to bolster national NGOs (NNGOs) and broader civil society with strong links to communities and insights into complex contextual dynamics.

²⁴ Survey responses were submitted by 127 representatives from international NGOs (53), national NGOs (51), multilateral agencies (18), civil society organisations (1) and others (4).

²⁵ For example, see recommendations included in: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2022), [DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus](#), OECD/LEGAL/5019.

²⁶ Fanning E, Fullwood-Thomas J (2019) [‘The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. What Does It Mean for Multi-Mandated Organizations?’](#) Oxfam Discussion Papers (Oxford: Oxfam); Manisha, T (2019) [‘NGO Perspectives on the EU’s Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Approach: Exploring the Challenges and Opportunities’](#) (Brussels: VOICE).

Local knowledge and experience are particularly important because the efficacy of an HDP nexus approach depends on shared and collective analysis that cuts across sectoral silos. South Sudanese NNGOs and community-based organisations are often best placed to understand the complex relationships between humanitarian need, development patterns and conflict dynamics, and how these connect to wider dynamics at the national and regional level. Their stronger embeddedness within communities, lived experience of the context and daily struggle for survival often depends on acquisition of such local knowledge. This gives them insights into the ‘hidden corners’ of a particular context that are often harder to see for relative outsiders, which can in turn facilitate a more intuitive understanding of how power and marginalisation – whether based on gender, ethnicity, age or other factors – manifests itself in a given community. Therefore, the HDP nexus demands that international actors place more value in local actors’ assessments of contexts and their experience of responding to local needs.²⁷ Adapting approaches to enable greater collaboration also presents an opportunity and an imperative for the international community to shift more decision-making power and resources towards national and local aid organisations,²⁸ ensuring they play a greater role from the outset in informing assessments of need and the design of programming approaches.

Despite this need, discussions with several South Sudanese NNGOs have shown that the concept of the HDP nexus remains somewhat abstract. There is insufficient clarity on what it means in practice and how national and local actors are ‘supposed to’ adapt their ways of working. However, when one takes a closer look at the context through an HDP nexus lens, it becomes clear that integrated approaches across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding silos are not new to local actors (including NNGOs, civil society organisations (CSOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), local faith groups, women’s rights and women-led organisations, and others).²⁹ Rather, such approaches are a logical response to community expectations for initiatives and programmes to address varied and interconnected needs (including those specific to women/girls, men/boys and marginalised groups), often taking into account both short- and long-term priorities. Although they sometimes continue to find ways to work across silos by using short-term funding from multiple donors, the way that international assistance has been structured into separate sectoral funding ‘pots’ creates incentives for NNGOs to sit more squarely within specific sectors and silos. Many local organisations already see the promotion of peace and social cohesion as a core part of their objective, even if most of their resources are devoted to catering for humanitarian needs due to the available funding opportunities.³⁰ Therefore, the risk that discussions around the HDP nexus in South Sudan have been too policy-oriented and detached from local realities needs to be understood and acted upon. The experience and perspectives of local groups, even if they do not explicitly label their own approaches as ‘HDP nexus’, can offer valuable lessons and insights to inform strategic efforts to incorporate HDP nexus approaches across the South Sudanese aid system.

²⁷ See CSRF (2020), [From ‘local knowledge’ to ‘collective intelligence’: the importance of relationships in enabling conflict sensitivity](#). Blog, Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility.

²⁸ See Robinson A (2021) (Ibid) for an analysis on how the localisation agenda can be implemented in a conflict-sensitive way in South Sudan.

²⁹ Agensky JC (2019), [‘Religion, Governance, and the ‘Peace–Humanitarian–Development Nexus’ in South Sudan’](#), in C de Coning, M Peter (eds.) *United Nations Peace Operations in a Changing Global Order* (Cham: Springer International Publishing), pp 277–95; Quack M, Suedhoff R (2020), [‘Triple Nexus in South Sudan: Learning from Local Opportunities’](#); Berlin CHA, 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.

³⁰ Robinson A (2021), [‘Localisation and conflict sensitivity: Lessons on good practice from South Sudan’](#).

The HDP nexus as an opportunity to strengthen the ‘peace’ pillar

While efforts around closer collaboration between development and humanitarian actors along the ‘dual nexus’ have been put into practice for some time³¹, humanitarian actors have generally been more hesitant to engage with peace actors. This is mainly due to the concern that an increasing focus on peace might put humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality at risk.³² However, the reality of operating in fragile and conflict-affected contexts has meant that there has been increased focus on the third ‘peace’ pillar, recognising that peace and conflict cannot and should not be neglected in areas of protracted humanitarian crisis, as the two are often linked.³³ In order to tackle humanitarian challenges and development in a sustainable and long-term way, the drivers of and underlying issues related to conflict need to be taken into account.

This existing reluctance is also related to the ambiguity around the conceptualisation of the ‘peace’ component. There is neither a common definition of what ‘peace’ means in diverse conflict-affected contexts, nor one of ‘peace-related approaches’ or ‘peace actions’, which range from conflict-prevention, conflict resolution and transformation, peacebuilding and reconciliation programmes to less directly related programmes on community security, education, empowerment of marginalised groups, social cohesion or economic opportunities.³⁴ While many community-based or civil society organisations understand peace to be a community-level reconciliation or social cohesion process, states, some multi-lateral organisations or donors may take a broader interpretation, including security, statebuilding, and stabilisation.³⁵ Some of these latter agendas can put aid actors in uncomfortable positions, where their work might be subject to political pressures and actual or perceived manipulation. This has been a pervasive issue at the global level with varying interpretations of the P component of the HDP nexus (i.e., often framed as small ‘p’ versus big ‘P’).³⁶

A bottom-up, localised operationalisation of the HDP nexus that strengthens mutual understanding of participants in the different sectors, and that creates spaces for synergies and learning, has great potential for humanitarian and development actors to strengthen their ability to contribute to peace and the conflict sensitivity of their programming. By focusing on the local level, context-specific interpretations of peace can be developed. International and national peacebuilding organisations, but also community-based or civil society organisations, often have thorough understanding and analysis on the conflict dynamics in specific areas based on conflict- and gender-sensitive community engagement and may be able to share their experience.

Lessons from South Sudan show that there are different ways in which peace actors can play a very valuable role in operationalising the nexus and improving the effectiveness of programming at the local level. They also demonstrate that development and humanitarian organisations have a potential to contribute to peace. Having a detailed, ethnographic understanding of conflict situations is crucial. This is especially important given the changing nature and structure of conflict and violence in South Sudan, where the dynamic situation makes it challenging to categorise regions into ‘stable’ and ‘unstable’. In Jonglei, for example, a collaboration with peacebuilding groups helped the World Food Programme (WFP) realise that its own understanding of peace dividends was sometimes different from those of communities. This collaboration also showed that ‘youth’ – a euphemistic term often

³¹ Though it should be noted that such dual-nexus approaches also continue to face similar challenges in practice and mindset e.g. working in silos, systemic and structural challenges.

³² Ibid.

³³ Especially since 2013, increasing direct linkages have been made by humanitarian actors, including the message that the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan cannot be resolved without addressing conflict. See, for example, [here](#).

³⁴ CSRF (2022) op. cit. footnote 30.

³⁵ Hövelmann S (2020), ‘Triple Nexus To Go’, CHA; Thomas M (2019), [NGO Perspectives on the EU’s Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Approach: Exploring the Challenges and Opportunities](#), Brussels: VOICE. Despite these distinct understandings, some humanitarian organisations have integrated social cohesion into their programming; for one example, see the [CRS case study April 2022](#).

³⁶ Bottcher C and Wittkowsky A (2021), [‘Give “P” a Chance: Peacebuilding, Peace Operations and the HDP Nexus](#).

used in South Sudan to refer to ‘men under the age of 45’ that obscures a more nuanced gendered analysis – should not solely be characterised as conflict actors, but also as actors that can make a substantive contribution to peace and enhance the access of humanitarian groups.³⁷ This experience helps to illustrate the value of strategic coordination between humanitarian and peacebuilding actors.

Exchanges with peacebuilders have, in turn, revealed that peace actors could also benefit greatly from collaborating more with development and humanitarian actors, who provide tangible support in the form of food assistance and infrastructure, among other forms of support. Those involved in peace initiatives may often find themselves confronted with root causes of conflict and community expectations that cannot be addressed with peacebuilding activities, such as dialogue, alone. An example shared in a peacebuilders’ workshop facilitated by the CSRF in October 2022 illustrated how some male youth in the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) strongly linked their raids in Jonglei with a lack of other income-generating opportunities (alongside other complexities) and saw that addressing this must be part of a long-term solution. While peace actors can build such understanding through, for example, dialogue, collaboration with humanitarian and development organisations to address interlinked drivers of conflict could be beneficial.

According to the mapping survey conducted by CSRF and UN RCO, organisations currently tend to collaborate with humanitarian and development more than with peacebuilding organisations. While, overall, 91 per cent of the respondents reported collaborating with humanitarian as well as development organisations in some way, the overall rate for collaboration with peacebuilding organisations lay at 84 per cent. Interestingly, as shown in Figure 1, when looking at different types of organisations, it becomes clear that international NGOs and, even more so, multilaterals (for example, UN agencies) report a lower rate of interaction with peacebuilders (83 per cent and 66 per cent, respectively) than national NGOs (92 per cent). This implies that there is room to strengthen the exchange with peace actors, especially among the international aid community.

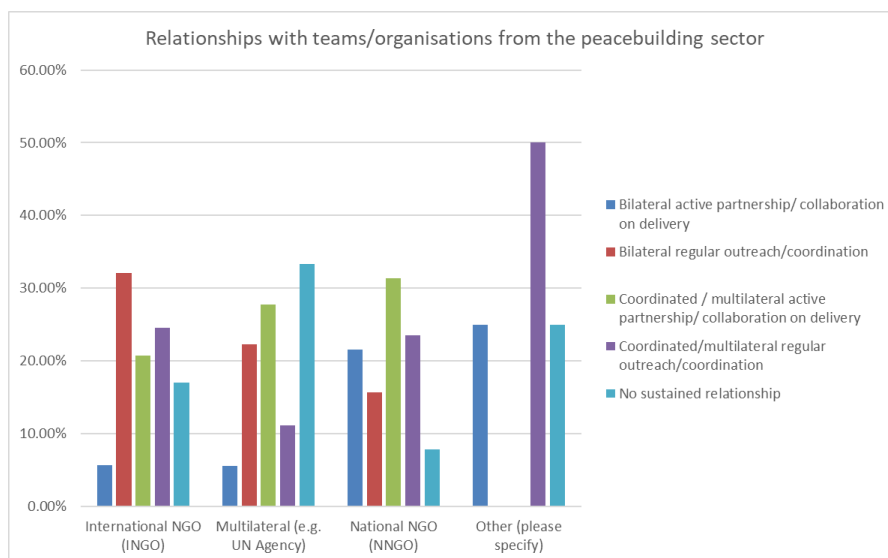


Figure 1: Relationships of South Sudanese actors with teams/organisations from the peacebuilding sector

When looking at what kind of peacebuilding activities respondents of the survey were engaged in, of the options given, the most common contributions to peace selected were ‘intra-communal relations and social cohesion’, ‘sexual and gender-based violence’ and ‘inter-communal relations and local peace processes’, followed by ‘participation of women and young people’. The options ‘security’ and ‘rule of law’, as well as ‘housing, land and property disputes’, were selected much less frequently. ‘International peacekeeping’ was only selected twice. This indicates that respondents working on

³⁷ Insights from a roundtable conducted by the CSRF in October 2022.

peace programming focus mainly on so-called ‘small p’, i.e., local-level peace contributions that encourages participation and social cohesion, rather than being involved in national-level security interventions or the national peace process.

Globally, there has been a shift towards greater acceptance of HDP nexus approaches among humanitarian actors and across the international aid system, particularly with the launch of the OECD DAC recommendation in 2019³⁸, and this has also been linked with a greater focus on the needs of individuals or local communities rather than security.³⁹ That said, this remains unclear territory and there is a need for greater contextualised understanding of lessons from policy and practice along the spectrum of peace actions and peacebuilding programming, especially in relation to HDP nexus approaches. Systems for capturing and sharing learning can build on existing research and practice, including, for example, recent studies on perceptions of peace among South Sudanese communities.⁴⁰

Another critical area of inquiry, both in and of itself as a pillar of the HDP nexus and with relevance to H-P and D-P collaboration, would be to update and deepen understanding of ‘development’ approaches in South Sudan. This includes learning and experience from governance approaches, which may offer valuable considerations for HDP nexus approaches and will become particularly pertinent as elections approach at the end of the R-ARCSS timeframe.

Community engagement in a meaningful and conflict-sensitive way

HDP nexus approaches aim to take on a more fluid and connected method, which reflects everyday reality for individuals and communities, and where needs and priorities are not divided into humanitarian, development and peace silos but are inherently intertwined. To be able to design responses that take the local context and needs as a starting point, engaging affected communities is crucial. Communities have a critical understanding of what their priorities and needs are and engaging them during the identification of priorities and the design and implementation of programmes strengthens accountability.

While community engagement already forms part of many HDP nexus approaches, including in South Sudan, it also brings conflict and gender sensitivity risks if not done in a meaningful way. Questions of who the community is, which community representatives should be involved and in what way, and how to develop an inclusive and participatory picture of what communities need is crucial (including the differing experiences and priorities of women/girls, men/boys and marginalised groups and how these identities intersect). All those involved in HDP nexus approaches need to be mindful of prioritising this understanding and the inter-woven power dynamics before engaging with them, and they need to be willing to be self-reflective and adequately respond to community feedback. Furthermore, ample thought needs to go into how to engage with authorities. Engaging with government authorities might be viewed with caution by some aid actors, but at the same time, if not involved, such authorities could act to damage long-term relationships between aid organisations and communities.⁴¹ If all these questions are not considered thoroughly, the risk is high that insufficient or insensitive community engagement may deepen existing divides and inequalities, lead to frustration and unmet expectations, and possibly even cause conflict or other harm within and between communities.

At the same time, engaging communities in a more coordinated way as enshrined by an HDP nexus approach offers valuable potential in terms of conflict sensitivity. Community representatives have frequently expressed frustration with how different groups tend to engage communities in parallel, creating similar structures as each other and duplicating what is already there, thereby asking a lot

³⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2022), [DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus](#), OECD/LEGAL/5019.

³⁹ Bottcher C and Wittkowsky A (2021), [‘Give “P” a Chance: Peacebuilding, Peace Operations and the HDP Nexus](#).

⁴⁰ Deng D et al. (2022), [‘Perceptions on Peace in South Sudan : Longitudinal Findings’](#).

⁴¹ Find more on community engagement in HDP nexus settings in South Sudan in a recent learning paper published by the CSRF

from the communities. This leads to fatigue on their side. If done in a collaborative, coherent and joined-up way, as is the intention of the HDP nexus, duplication can be avoided, and communities can be engaged much more effectively and sustainably. Collaboration platforms can be kept lean and the strain on communities low. Furthermore, engaging in long-term and sustainable partnerships – not only with local organisations but also with communities – can increase trust and strengthen the agency of communities.

The pitfalls and opportunities described above are very relevant for South Sudan. In a roundtable conducted by the CSRF on the collaboration of humanitarian and peacebuilding practitioners specifically, it was mentioned that greater collaboration between these groups could facilitate the identification and building of relationships with key people in communities. These might include, for example, spiritual or faith-based leaders, women’s leaders and armed youth leaders. A relationship of trust with such groups and individuals could benefit all aid actors in terms of conflict sensitivity, accountability, and also for their own safety. In South Sudan, some of the regions with high levels of need (for example, Lakes, Tonj, Jonglei) also experience high levels of violence. The provision of humanitarian assistance in these regions is therefore highly risky in terms of conflict sensitivity, while involving communities and local leaders is crucial to ensure aid is provided in a dignified way. Through a collaboration along the HDP nexus, humanitarian organisations could benefit from existing relationships between peacebuilding actors and communities. At the same time, engaging with the same community focal points as peacebuilders is also beneficial for the latter, as, for example, the provision of humanitarian assistance may strengthen the legitimacy of these structures to further support peacebuilding work.⁴²

When it comes to interacting with authorities, especially at the lower administrative levels (that is, county commissioners, *payam* administrators or chiefs), insights from CSRF engagement with South Sudanese peace actors show that working closely with local authorities is crucial for community engagement. Even though current conflict dynamics are often perceived as being orchestrated by national-level authorities, communities in many areas may still acknowledge local-level authorities as their leaders. Therefore, it is important to consider the role of these local authorities and their interaction with aid; for example, they may help to increase the support aid organisations are receiving from communities and their willingness to collaborate. Moreover, involving local authorities in activities, whether they are of peacebuilding, development or humanitarian in nature, strengthens accountability between authorities and aid actors, as well as of authorities towards communities.

Summary and recommendations

While there are some positive lessons based on the experience of existing attempts at operationalising the HDP nexus, how the approach is perceived and applied also carries conflict sensitivity risks. This is particularly the case if it is viewed as a top-down policy instrument and if it reinforces existing weaknesses of the international aid system rather than overcoming them. This applies to South Sudan, in particular, where a more coherent and joined-up approach to address local priorities and needs and drivers of violence, conflict and insecurity is especially relevant, and at the same time enables complementarity between the specific roles and strengths of humanitarian, development and peace actors. This analysis piece has highlighted some important insights from the previous decades of aid in South Sudan and has focused on some key issues: the question of how the HDP nexus can be used to strengthen locally-led approaches; the pitfalls and opportunities of an increased focus on the ‘peace’ element; and the role of community engagement for a meaningful operationalisation of the nexus. Several recommendations emerge from the analysis:

⁴² Inputs from the roundtable by WFP and Coalition for Humanity; find more on this in the [learning paper on H-P collaboration](#), which was recently published by the CSRF.

1. **Take lessons from previous and current HDP nexus approaches into account:** There is no need to ‘reinvent the wheel’; the HDP nexus speaks to thinking and discussions that have been going on for a long time. Thus, there are many insightful examples of how different forms of programming and collaboration along HDP nexus approaches or thinking have been and are currently applied in South Sudan. Operationalising HDP nexus approaches in a conflict- and gender-sensitive way entails learning from this experience and building on and working with what is already there. This includes South Sudanese structures and traditional institutions, previous and existing programmes, and initiatives by communities, civil society, and local authorities.⁴³
2. **Use the opportunity of interest in the HDP nexus to meaningfully allow for locally-led responses that build on the strengths of local and national organisations.** South Sudanese people must be at the centre of effective aid interventions, including playing a leading role in designing and implementing programming and supporting the agency of those outside of Juba and formal aid structures. Rather than asking local, subnational and national groups to comply with the HDP nexus as a new approach to international cooperation, interest in HDP nexus approaches represent an opportunity to fortify or instigate shifts in working cultures towards more local leadership. Invest in long-term partnerships with local actors, including women and women-led organisations, and support them in a transition towards taking more decision-making power.
3. **Donors should assess their own systems and structures and whether they support or inhibit a shift towards HDP nexus approaches.** In order to help create a more conducive environment for increased collaboration and to enable collective outcomes to be realised, there is a need for those with influence over systems, structures and funding to ‘walk the talk’. Lessons from recent developments should be taken into account, for example, an increase in nexus-friendly financing models.⁴⁴ This is not only the case for donor approaches and funding streams, but also for the wider aid architecture, for example, in planning cycles and coordination mechanisms. The application of HDP nexus approaches require a shift from firefighting and technical silos to longer-term planning cycles and flexible integrated approaches. This will also support greater integration of other relevant considerations, such as gender equality and climate change, as well as more equitable sharing of resources with local partners.
4. **Invest in strategic partnerships not only among humanitarian and development groups, but also with peacebuilding actors.** Conflict dynamics affect all aid operations in South Sudan across the nexus: conflict at all levels drives humanitarian need, destabilises development efforts, and undermines progress towards peace. The interconnected nature of conflict dynamics across the national, subnational, and local levels adds further complexity. The ‘peace’ component needs to be strengthened, with context-specific peace contributions placed at the forefront of programme design to enable contributions towards expanded efforts to achieve positive, sustainable peace. This need not threaten humanitarian principles, but rather can help to enable humanitarians to further build on the role that effective humanitarian aid can play in creating a more conducive environment for peace.
5. **Local context and experience are key, and therefore effective community engagement is critical.** Conflict-sensitive community engagement includes learning from South Sudanese experiences and traditions, ensuring inclusivity while navigating existing power dynamics, and ultimately ensuring accountability to and transparency with communities. More collective approaches to community engagement can be further supported by improved communication, information-sharing and coordination.

⁴³ A list of examples of different HDP nexus approaches in South Sudan can be found in the Annex.

⁴⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2022), [The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Interim Progress Review](#)

Conclusion

As with previous approaches that have sought to achieve similar coherence across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding programmes, the HDP nexus is not a panacea and efforts towards HDP nexus approaches are often not easy or straightforward. Effective application requires building and maintaining relationships that enable information-sharing and collective understanding, adaptability, and an ability to work in complex environments. HDP nexus approaches can also cause harm if they are not conflict-sensitive. Yet, conflict-sensitive HDP nexus approaches can offer ways to improve the aid response in South Sudan, enabling reflection on consequences and maximising opportunities for connectivity. There is a need to ensure that increasing familiarity with HDP nexus definitions and technical language does not blind us to similar mindsets that speak to the same approach. Learning from the experience of South Sudanese organisations and communities will be important to ensure that the aid system in South Sudan continues to be based on the context and bottom-up/community-based approaches rather than on international or national top-down policy approaches.

Annex: Examples of the HDP nexus approaches in South Sudan

This table presents a summary of some recent case studies or experiences relevant for HDP nexus approaches. It is by no means an exhaustive assessment of every relevant case study, however, it serves to illustrate the breadth and diversity of relevant experience in South Sudan that may offer useful lessons to build upon.

Case study	Summary	Select reflections
<p>Faith actors in South Sudan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How local faith groups have worked, or are already working, within the parameters of an HDP nexus approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church-led approaches to the context have on many occasions combined peacebuilding (for example, the ecumenical South Sudan Council of Churches Action Plan for Peace and its predecessor the New Sudan Council of Churches; also similar peace-focused bodies within the Episcopal, Catholic and Presbyterian churches) with connected approaches to humanitarian and development activities, in close collaboration with (often multi-mandate) faith-based organisations, including NNGOs and INGOs. • Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron at its heart seeks to link development with peace and reconciliation, combining peacebuilding approaches with meeting livelihoods, education and health needs.⁴⁵ • Faith-based organisations have also sought to further build on these lessons. For example, DanChurchAid (DCA) has worked with local partners to implement the ‘Generating sustainable livelihoods and leadership for peace’ project. This comprises interrelated and long-term outcomes, including resilience livelihoods and food security, social cohesion, and peaceful conflict resolution.⁴⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People-to-People processes that developed out of New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) facilitate dialogues (most famously, Wunlit). These have enabled the discussion of wide-ranging interests, leading to shared understanding between diverse groups.⁴⁷ However, one frustration from the NSCC was that a willingness to fund conferences was not matched by aid to finance the implementation of the recommendations in the peace accords, which were often related to development priorities. Similar frustrations have been experienced in more recent peace processes (e.g., the Pieri Agreement). • ‘Peace is a process, not a project’ is an often-spoken mantra, illustrating the need for a long-term approach towards addressing the multifaceted needs and priorities of communities. • Buy-in of parties across different conflict and political allegiances is also required to enable such processes to be successful.
<p>Linking across dual pillars</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) in South Sudan • Linking peace building/conflict prevention with resilience and livelihoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) concept extends as far back as the 1980s and has been applied over the 80s and 90s in Southern Sudan. Previously based on an ‘aid continuum’ (i.e., a linear transition from relief to development), more recent thinking has emphasised not just linking different kinds of aid but also finding a different model of long-term engagement that can deal with protracted and recurrent crises (i.e., a two-way LRRD, where the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LRRD interventions that had strong engagement and local partnerships on the ground were best able to marry short- and long-term perspectives. • Build on lessons (including successes and shortcomings) from the past to improve models. • Conflict analysis, which is multilevel and multizone and informed by both technical knowledge and local knowledge and understandings, can

⁴⁵ Christian Aid (2018), [‘In it for the long haul? Lessons on peacebuilding in South Sudan’](#).

⁴⁶ de Wolf F, Wilkinson O (2019), [‘The Triple Nexus, Localization, and Local Faith Actors: The intersections between faith, humanitarian response, development, and peace’](#) (Washington DC; Copenhagen: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, DanChurchAid).

⁴⁷ Christian Aid (2018) op. cit. footnote 40.

	<p>relief and development sides go in both directions supporting a more holistic approach).⁴⁸</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Nuba Mountains Programme Advancing Conflict Transformation (NMPACT) in the Nuba Mountains integrated objectives relating to food security and conflict transformation under one coordination structure. NMPACT was praised for its innovative approach and early results,⁴⁹ but also reflected a tension between a heavily criticised ‘peace-through-development’ approach and a ‘political humanitarianism’ approach that played an important role in its perceived success. • There have also been strategic efforts to link peace with resilience and livelihoods approaches within organisational approaches. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Christian Aid applied an Integrated Conflict Prevention and Resilience Approach (ICPR) in Northern Bahr el Ghazal from 2017 to 2018, focusing on working across the HDP nexus to address the full scope of needs of people affected by crisis.⁵⁰ ○ Search for Common Ground supported a project to facilitate community interlocutors and religious leaders from divided communities to come together in dialogue, and to identify social, economic and/or livelihood priorities while also enhancing social cohesion.⁵¹ 	<p>improve conflict sensitivity and programme effectiveness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for community agency can shore up longer-term impact and effective implementation, including capacity-strengthening, mentoring, peer-to-peer support, and incorporating advocacy into community action plans. • The peacebuilding–resilience nexus remains relatively poorly understood.
<p>Linking shared economic interest and peace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace markets • Migration conferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crossline peace markets have been a recurring feature in periods of conflict in South Sudan. Shared economic interests can create opportunities for peace. Synergistic livelihoods that demand a degree of cooperation (such as movement for grazing, water or access to commodities) are a key feature, therefore, peace markets facilitate the mixing of different groups across conflict divides, enabling social, economic and military relationships to build. • Other similar and related initiatives include migration conferences, livestock vaccination, among others. • Examples include locations of exchange between Dinka and Nuer in Greater Upper Nile, between the Baggara communities and Dinka and/or Nuer in Bahr el Ghazal and Unity states. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic mutual interest can bind together diverse actors, and such interaction can be the foundation for longer-term transformational change, including the development of locally relevant institutions and space for transitional justice and reconciliation. • A sophisticated package of support from aid actors, based on understanding the situation, can strengthen local peace efforts. • Strategic linkages to <u>the</u> security sector or informal security groups are required to guarantee security along roads and at the market.

⁴⁸ Mosel I, Levine S (2014), ‘[Remaking the case for linking relief, rehabilitation and development How LRRD can become a practically useful concept for assistance in difficult places](#)’, Humanitarian Policy Group.

⁴⁹ Pantuliano S (2003), ‘[Harnessing the Potential of Aid to Protect Livelihoods and Promote Peace – the Experience of the Nuba Mountains Programme Advancing Conflict Transformation \(NMPACT\)](#)’.

⁵⁰ Christian Aid (2019), ‘[Integrating Conflict Prevention in Humanitarian Resilience Programmes](#)’.

⁵¹ Dowd C, Kumalo L (2022), ‘[Better ways to build peace and resilience in South Sudan](#)’, Institute For Security Studies.

<p>Multi-partner cooperation across three pillars (reconciliation, stabilisation and resilience):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilisation and Resilience (RSRTF) • Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PFRR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RSRTF is a joint effort of the UN Country Team (UNCT), the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) and several donors. It has been piloting approaches across three pillars of reconciliation, stabilisation and resilience that promote stabilisation and social cohesion as a means of breaking the cycles of violence that drive South Sudan’s protracted humanitarian crisis, in coordination with UNMISS political and peacekeeping activities. It focuses on several more fragile and marginalised areas and explicitly seeks to promote ‘sustainable locally-led, context specific and evidence-based action’. For example:⁵² <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In 2021, in the RSRTF’s Area Based Programme in Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA), peace organisations (such as Peace Canal) supported a local peace process, which led to the signing of the Piber Peace Agreement in March 2021. RSRTF was then brought into this process and helped to implement some of its resolutions. In an historic achievement, <u>which</u> helped to enable the return of 130 abductees, credited as one of the most tangible recent symbols of ‘peace dividends’ in Greater Jonglei. RSRTF consisted of 16 partners from across the HDP spectrum, including national and international partners. ○ In the latest call for proposals, the UN RSRTF has made it mandatory that a <u>NGO</u> partner has to be a member of the consortium – not just as a <u>sub-grantee</u>, but incorporated into the consortium, with an element of <u>mentoring and capacity-strengthening</u> to be able it to take on the work. • The Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (since renamed as the Partnership for <i>Peace</i>, Recovery and Resilience or PfPRR) is a coordination mechanism focusing on ‘working together to reduce vulnerability and increase the resilience of people, communities and institutions in South Sudan on their way to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals’, emphasising local ownership and conflict sensitivity across the nexus.⁵³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active, locally-based cooperation across the nexus, enabling relevant expertise, resourcing and the ability to act quickly, is important to sustain peacemaking efforts and back these up with ‘peace dividends’. • Sustained peacebuilding efforts are important to sustain the momentum of peace processes, and local <u>men and women</u> peacemakers can play a key role. • Effective coordination mechanisms specifically oriented around an HDP nexus approach can facilitate <u>information-sharing</u> and resource pooling. • Area Reference Group approaches have the potential to increase local ownership.
<p>‘Ad hoc’ local collaboration between H-D-P actors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NBeG PAC is a local-level collaboration of peace and humanitarian actors to address potential conflict, as well as resulting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local mechanisms and social capital are not always visible to external aid actors because they are not funded by them in

⁵² See RSRTF materials: <https://openaid.se/en/activities/SE-0-SE-6-13324A0101-SSD-15220>; <https://mptf.undp.org/fund/ssr00>

⁵³ PfRR website: www.southsudanpfr.org/page/who-we-are

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Northern Bahr el Ghazal (NBeG) Peace Actors Cluster (PAC) 	<p>humanitarian need due to seasonal cattle movement. It includes representatives from a range of humanitarian and peacebuilding organisations, such as VSF-Suisse, Saferworld, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UNMISS Civil Affairs. While there is no specific funding for the NBeG PAC itself, its members bring complementary skills and resources that have contributed towards a reduction in violence. This has been achieved through support to pre-migration conferences (focused on negotiation of livestock migration corridors and planning of livestock vaccination campaigns) and exit/post-migration conferences (focused on resolving outstanding issues or grievances before pastoralists leave).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PAC builds on vast local experience and expertise of conducting peace conferences with Misseriya and Rizeigat, informal early warning mechanisms, chief courts addressing conflicts between Misseriya and Dinka, and an extensive network of contacts with traders and community leaders across the border in Sudan. 	<p>formal projects. However, they can play a fundamental and essential role in enabling effective collaboration and providing fertile ground for impactful and sustainable approaches and initiatives.</p>
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