

# CSRF Case Study #2: Baselines and Programme Design

## *Conflict Sensitivity at the Programme Level*

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*Strengthening conflict sensitivity at the programme level requires a mixture of building motivation, strengthening capacity, working on systems, and providing tools to help organisations better understand the conflict dynamics around them, and adapt to be more conflict sensitive.*

*These changes may indirectly influence an organisation's institutional approach toward conflict sensitivity, as individuals within the organization are able to apply the lessons to other areas of their work.*

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### Background

Development and humanitarian programmes in areas of protracted conflict face a range of conflict sensitivity challenges that technical expertise is often inadequate to understand and manage. These challenges not only have serious implications for local conflict and peace dynamics, but also can have disproportionate impacts on whether the projects themselves succeed or fail – projects that are technically sound can dramatically fail if aid actors don't understand the conflict environment in which they're working.

Support from the CSRF to a five-year FAO fisheries programme provides an illustration of how conflict sensitivity support can enable a complex programme to anticipate conflict-related challenges that have the potential to lead to increased tensions and violence as well as undermine the programme's technical objectives. Once identified and anticipated, the programme is also able to act to avoid or mitigate the impact from these challenges.

The fisheries sector in South Sudan is relatively undeveloped as a commercial enterprise, but feeds into the livelihood strategies of many. The initial design of the fisheries programme was designed with mainly technical considerations in mind, based on FAO's global best practices around small-scale, commercial fishing activities, but was not significantly adapted to the local context. The management team was not aware of the experiences of previous fisheries projects that had been implemented in that area and their interaction with the local communities, or how the local communities interacted with each other.

### CSRF Engagement

The Dutch Embassy asked the CSRF to comment on the proposal submitted by the FAO, which led to identification of potential risks and untapped opportunities. At the request of the Dutch Embassy, which is funding the activity, FAO engaged with the CSRF during the project's inception period and agreed to add questions to its baseline analysis that would help to build understanding of the local fisheries and conflict context.

The Programme Manager had initially been reluctant to invest energy in conflict sensitivity analysis, worrying that it would lead to additional work and programme requirements with little additional benefit. The results from the revised baseline survey were, however, eye-opening. FAO uncovered a number of dynamics that would have the potential to affect both the project's success and its impact

*This paper is one of four case studies commissioned by the CSRF in February 2022 to better understand where and how contributions to conflict sensitivity have been made, and to draw out lessons for future engagement by the CSRF or other similar facilities. The case studies examine and compare outcomes at the activity, programme, sector, and paradigm level.*

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on local conflict dynamics. These included a better understanding of community-level dynamics around beneficiary selection, improved analysis of the potential impact of the programme's procurement and distribution plan, and the discovery of ongoing (if latent) conflict over one aspect of a previous fisheries activity.

## Outcomes

Based on the findings of the baseline survey, FAO initiated several changes to the programme, including:

- **Beneficiary selection:** FAO found that previous fisheries activities implemented in the area had only worked with certain groups, leaving other groups feeling aggrieved and marginalized. The initial beneficiary selection criteria had focused only on technical aspects such as proximity to fishing areas and markets and did not include any understanding of how selection of groups may interact with conflict dynamics. The beneficiary selection criteria was revised to include consideration of groups that had not yet been selected for inclusion in fisheries projects, and intergroup relationships.
- **Potential for misuse of resources:** The project initially planned to provide motorboats to each fishing group. However, consultations revealed conflict risks associated with the planned motorboat component of the activity. Motorboats are high-value, desirable commodities that are difficult to maintain and expensive to use. They are also valuable to armed groups and local power structures and are thus prone for confiscation for alternative uses. Community consultations to manage these risks and determine appropriate selection modalities are underway and have so far identified a women's group of fish traders as one likely beneficiary, and other groups that have not yet been targeted.
- **Community conflict deadlock:** The additional analysis shed light on the difficulties that had beset the Bor Ice Plant, an earlier fisheries-related project built by UNDP. The plant was intended to improve the fisheries value chain in the area, providing ice to help keep fish fresh longer. However, the design of the programme didn't fully consider community-level dynamics; conflict within the community over the longer-term management of the ice plant emerged almost immediately and the entire ice plant's operations were said to have shut down only 2-3 days after launch. At the time of writing, the plant has never served its intention, and now needs substantial repairs to operate. Having been forewarned of this dynamic, FAO was able to initiate additional consultations and analysis to determine how best to manage the complex situation, seek a positive outcome and avoid similar challenges on its own plans to engage the private sector in longer-term management of fishery infrastructures.

The ability to translate analysis into action was the second necessary component to improving the programme's conflict sensitivity. This is supported by a flexible work plan and a supportive donor. This flexibility has so far been sufficient to enable FAO to integrate its new analysis into its plan, but several the challenges that are now known will need ongoing analysis and adaptation over time.

The five-year horizon for the project enables robust learning and strong institutional memory, though this will take an investment of time and intention by FAO, and likely ongoing encouragement by the Dutch Embassy. The Programme Manager states that he is convinced of the value and utility of the conflict sensitivity exercise that they've done so far, crediting CSRF for being approachable, straightforward, and helpful. He attests that the information gathered during the analysis helped to prevent negative interactions between the programme and the local conflict dynamics. However, it remains to be seen whether this initial engagement will have a longer-term impact on the programme's conflict sensitivity. The role that the Dutch Embassy played in encouraging conflict sensitivity at the outset was critical for the gains that were made; in the absence of such encouragement or of sustained leadership support, systems, and tools for conflict sensitivity within

FAO, the programme may struggle to maintain understanding of and be responsive to the ever-changing conflict dynamics in the area.

### Key Findings and Lessons

- Individuals and organisations are sometimes reluctant initially to engage with conflict sensitivity, fearing that it will lead to additional (uncompensated) work, or highlight failings of the programme to donors or outside observers. In fact, when done well, conflict sensitivity helps to identify potential challenges in advance, helping organisations to anticipate and prevent or mitigate conflict-related challenges that could cause their programmes to fail or contribute to conflict. **The CSRF and its donors should consider framing conflict sensitivity not as an “additional” thing that a programme might do, but as a way to make their programmes more effective and avoid unforeseen challenges.**
- A strategy of risk avoidance and ‘Do No Harm’ are the most common entry points for improving approaches to conflict sensitivity, but **ideally the CSRF and its partners are able to build on initial engagement to also consider the principle of ‘Do More Good.’** The fisheries sector along the White Nile holds many opportunities for this, as it links a range of potentially competing communities along a common natural resource and economic activity.
- **Donors play a key role in incentivising partner engagement with conflict sensitivity**, both explicitly (through proposal and reporting requirements) and implicitly (through their public statements, discussions, and principles). Donors and the CSRF should collaborate to identify the partnerships and programmes that would most benefit from conflict sensitivity support.
- Conflict sensitivity is perhaps most easily introduced into a programme at the design and proposal stage, before work plans, resources, and deliverables are finalised. **A flexible approach to supporting partners at critical moments would allow the CSRF to capitalise on windows of opportunities that could have outsized impacts.**