

Lessons learned from Jonglei RSRTF Programming

- 1. Nexus programming requires more than just enhanced coordination between pillars:** In South Sudan, humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus programming is often just D programming with a small or intentional social cohesion (P) element. Furthermore, nexus programming often focuses on geographic areas that are considered to be conducive for such programming (i.e., “pockets of stability or peace”) rather than the actual hotspots of violence where peace and development programming is most crucial. This project recognises that continuing to work in 3 silos (reconciliation, stabilisation, and resilience) with some enhanced coordination is not sustainable. As such, peace contributions are placed at the forefront of programme design, whereby all programming is based on two key questions: 1) Do the interventions support those communities or areas facing the highest levels of conflict; and 2) How can any given activity or intervention disincentivise violence and/or incentivise peace. Incremental gains which contribute to enhanced stability (if not peace) will help build a foundation for more expanded efforts to achieve positive peace, through complementary or sequential programming by project partners and other actors. Partners recognise the importance – and cost – of effective joint programming which means prioritising *strategic* coordination in areas where that is necessary over coordination for the sake of it, while also incentivising effective coordination. As such the M&E logframe will include an indicator on coordination for all partners.
- 2. Situating dialogue in a process:** Dialogue events should only be supported if they are part of a systematic process with clear accountability mechanisms. There are myriad dialogue events across South Sudan on a regular basis. Often these are not situated as part of a longer-term process, with material support only provided by peace partners for specific peace dialogue events. Whatever monitoring mechanisms may be agreed in theory, in practice there are no resources for implementation and invariably the next dialogue will be in response to further violence, and so the cycle continues. At each stage of the Jonglei peacebuilding process, the more prominent milestones (the spear ceremony, the Rumbek Dialogue, the Pieri Conference) were necessary but insufficient engagements. Subsequent conflict dynamics in each case after the events that would likely have led to a larger mobilisation without the sustained engagement on the ground.
- 3. Addressing historical memory:** Dialogue is more effective where there is a structured element of dealing with the past. Among all actors, there is a deep need for psycho-social support. This needs to include victims and perpetrators. One-off output-driven trauma healing workshops or trauma awareness training have limited results, unless it is linked to longer term engagement. These issues can be addressed, in small part, by situating truth-telling centrally in dialogue processes and creating space for personal experiences and impact to be shared. This can be sufficient for actors to move into a new phase of peacebuilding engagement, but does not fundamentally address the broader psycho-social needs. Symbolic reconciliation is also central, and needs to happen through traditional practices and leadership. While the Greater Jonglei engagement has created some effective space for sharing the impact of conflict, and has also created important connection points for humanising the adversary, the full legacy of conflict remains largely unaddressed at this stage of the process. It has also become clear that the women often play a more natural role in the sharing of impact around conflict, whereas men tend to focus more on the attribution of blame. This underlines in yet another way the importance of creating spaces for women in the unfolding process.
- 4. Taking a ‘system’ view of peace dividends and focussing on community priorities:** Progress in social relationships can only be sustainable with the realisation of substantive peace dividends, and the community may weigh factors in unexpected ways. In the follow-up to the Pieri Conference, for example, the centrality to confidence and trust building of the return of abducted women and children was categorical. In the popular narrative, the primacy of cattle to the communities is often emphasised. Yet since the Pieri Conference, it was clear that the ongoing return of women and children was perceived as a sufficient dividend to hold back agitation of youth to mobilise for raiding. Nonetheless, materially speaking, the armed youth leaders themselves have bluntly presented their dilemma: among other things, cattle raiding is key livelihood activity. In this sense, their commitment to peace is provisional and subject to visible signs of economic progress where they can see viable alternative livelihoods for themselves. The status of some youth leaders, derived from raiding, also needs to be factored into negotiations; they need to feel that future benefits are commensurate or superior to both the material and social capital they realise through raiding.
- 5. Engaging those directly responsible for initiating violence:** The risks of engagement with armed actors need to be overcome. Lessons learned in peacebuilding work in Western Lakes and in Jonglei, found the prevailing narrative singularly describes armed youth leaders as criminals and perpetrators of human rights violations. Focusing on this dimension tends to characterise them as a problem to mitigate rather than exploring the possibility they could make a substantively positive contribution to the peace. In both contexts, and in most (but not all) individual cases, it was found that the line between violence-oriented choices and peace-oriented choices is more fluid than it is perceived externally, generally linked to an economic choice. There is agreement on the need to engage the key actors; too often this ends up being only the key actors we like.
- 6. Working through traditional structures, practices and leadership:** Prioritising and valuing traditional conflict management mechanisms at the community level. There needs to be a locally-guided balance of tradition, modern religion and the modern state. Some have viewed this as mutual exclusive. The role of traditional,

spiritual, and religious leaders in Jonglei peace processes all factored into community perceptions of peace initiatives, as well as the level of commitment to any agreements. Agreements need to identify the locally meaningful signs of commitment. These will rarely – if ever – involve a written document. Documents can be included as a supplement for a literate audience, but the traditional practices should be central; for example, spear ceremonies, the killing of the white bull, and so on. Processes need to mediate the diversity of these rituals and the associated belief systems. As the narrative of the Pieri Peace Conference in Jonglei shows, it was not substantive issues that proved the primary point of contention, but the ritual ceremonies themselves.

7. **Definitions of community are complex:** The language of custom and community tends to evoke positive associations of authenticity, belonging and harmony. It is important to recognise, however, that customs and communities can be defined in deeply exclusionary ways, creating or maintaining individual and structural forms of power and privilege. While much policy and analysis assume that ethnic communities are the basis of customary authority in South Sudan, the reality is more complicated. Therefore, defining communities and the rights accorded their members through the use of custom can be the basis not only for exclusion and conflict, but also for maintaining power and inequality within these communities. Moreover, the complexity of affiliation and identity across South Sudan demonstrates a continuing plurality of power. Considerations around the complexity of communities and the different roles that any one individual will have within his or her lifetime must form the basis of strategic sequencing of engagement with different actors and stakeholders in peace processes.
8. **Community outreach and engagement enhances support for activities and facilitates local ownership:** Local authorities and community members may obstruct the implementation of activities or may improve their impact and increase their sustainability when they take ownership in their implementation. Failure to inform and consult with communities and engage them in the activities has been shown to create unintended spoilers during implementation and create the impression that the processes are owned and decided by the UN, NGOs, and other entities. In contrast, sensitization, outreach and direct involvement of local authorities, like chiefs and Boma administrators, has shown to encourage cooperation and ownership of relevant tasks that facilitate the implementation of activities. Furthermore, outreach and sensitization, in some circumstances, may be more impactful and enhance local ownership when is undertaken directly by those working on project mechanisms, such as judicial actors serving on mobile courts, or government officials rather than directly by the consortium's international partners.
9. **Keeping the external politics at an appropriate distance:** Maintaining an authorising environment through engagement with elites and government; keeping them updated but maintaining ownership at the community level. The external politics are both enmeshed in the local dynamics and distant from it. Actors on the ground have encountered a growing realisation among armed actors that they have been instrumentalised by elites; in main towns, in Juba and in the diaspora. The local communities are now increasingly adamant that the process must be led at the community level, and this higher-level interference is strongly resisted. As described in the narrative above, previous experience has indicated both the power of the elites to sabotage activities, as well as the power of the local communities to ensure activities go ahead even with resistance from some elites.
10. **Learning from other relevant South Sudanese experiences and traditions:** Despite contextual differences there is value in sharing dialogue experiences across locations. Stakeholders have focused on distilling principles from different locations that can provide a lens for exploring similar issues elsewhere. That said, they recognise a key pitfall in wider peace programming: attempting to transpose a programme design directly from one location to another, and believing it is possible to short-cut the process for arriving at the design and neglecting the trust building steps that are indispensable to community ownership. Importantly, trust is not built through one-off 'community consultations' or 'participatory workshops' but through an iterative process of engagement among equals. Opportunities to share experiences across contexts have also proven useful.
11. **Responding flexibly and rapidly as the context changes:** inflexible activity programming, often based on traditional logframe approaches, will invariably fail. The process of consolidating a negative peace is not complicated, but does require political engagement and ability to respond quickly to emerging opportunities. Whilst plenty of indications have been identified of what would not work, it was less clear what exactly will work. Ultimately, it is a question of sustained engagement and being ready to respond when an appropriate opportunity arises. Critically, each step of the engagement process itself acts as a function of the confidence and trust built, and should be identified by the interlocutors themselves, so cannot be pre-programmed. This may be seen by some as an outlier approach to peacebuilding programming, whereas stakeholders consider it should be more and more the essence of effective peacebuilding.
12. **Transparency and clarity with communities:** There is a high level of scepticism within communities towards externally led interventions. A significant element of this is a perception of historical unmet expectations and unkept promises. In some cases, the challenges in delivery are understandable, but too often actors don't take the time to communicate that message clearly back to the affected communities. As such, ensuring that communication with communities is clear about what is and is not possible, and wherever a commitment is made, following through on that commitment, is crucial to the success of peace interventions.
13. **Working with trusted local partners:** Taking time to understand and triangulate the dynamics of the local actors, then working closely alongside those who can facilitate entry points. Lack of collaboration on the ground undermines progress. The territoriality that external actors often perceive amongst South Sudanese institutions is

sometimes replicated between international peace partners. Without investment in collaboration with local partners, spiritual and traditional leaders, with State and National Government actors, the Ministry in Juba, and with other international agencies, the project's success will likely be undermined. A key frustration has been witnessing situations where another peace actor has not shared plans or has attempted an intervention that could be more effective through a collaborative approach. Much more can be achieved beyond simple information sharing, so that activities of different actors are mutually visible, but this minimum standard can avoid pitfalls in the wider process.

14. **Strengthening livelihoods groups and institutions to ensure better market linkages:** Existing resilience projects focused on strengthening backward and forward market linkages of for smallholders have highlighted the importance of strengthening informal livelihoods groups as well as rural institutions (like farmer's organisations). Informal livelihood groups have emerged as critical sources of material support and wellbeing within Tonj's rural communities. These groups have become especially important to the abilities of their members to cope and adapt during crisis, particularly when displacement weakens kinship networks and the reliability and extent of support between kin. In addition to the economic benefits that these groups offer their members, those who have to travel outside of their displacement areas (such as women and traders) also benefit from the safety, protection, shared trust, and information that these groups offer. By targeting such groups for resilience, reconciliation, and stabilization activities, different components of the project can also strengthen one another. Strengthening rural institutions allows for enhanced sustainability of implementation capacity from which the State Ministry of Agriculture and other development actors can draw to expand the activities beyond this project (period, thematic area and geography) to other areas.
15. **Multiple adoption of climate-smart agriculture innovations increases resilience of smallholder farmers to climate change:** Conservation agriculture, flood tolerant upland rice, cassava and improved legume varieties are key climate change management strategies for smallholder farmers in Tonj and South Sudan. Their complementary efforts in adaptation to climate change are sternly important for farm productivity and income. ADRA rice, cassava and legumes pilot elucidate individual and multiple adoption of climate change management strategies and their differential impacts on productivity and income. ADRA will employ a multiple adoption of innovation strategy which has helped smallholder farmers' access key resources (credit, income and information), level of agriculture education and water & land conservation and use by the farmer. More so, the concurrent adoption of conservation agriculture, stress adapted legume varieties, flood and or drought tolerant upland rice and cooperative farming approach (through farmers' association and aggregation center) has far greater dividends on productivity and income than when considered individually. However, impacts of multiple adoption of the practices are not entirely uniform across different geographic regions and gender. Results suggest that effective institutional and policy efforts targeted towards reducing resource constraints that inhibit farmers' capacity to adopt complementary climate-smart agriculture packages such as conservation agriculture, drought tolerant rice and improved legume varieties must be gender sensitive and context specific.