



## **Guidance Note**

### **Strengthening Social Cohesion in South Sudan** *(Developed in coordination with Nonviolent Peaceforce)*

**The Context** – As South Sudan works towards implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement, opportunities for peace building should be pursued in order to repair and strengthen social bonds and inter-community cohesion. The absence of social services and livelihood opportunities, and perceptions of isolation and marginalization all contribute to undermining durable peace. Decreased communal tensions will promote better governance; increase livelihoods and access to essential services.

Ethnic and inter-communal clashes account for a major proportion of the insecurity in South Sudan. The key drivers of intercommunal conflict and violence include disputes over grazing lands, water and pastures, cattle raids/rustling, revenge killings and attacks, and proliferation of arms. Conflict has undermined community interdependence systems that traditionally helped nurture a culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Against the backdrop of poverty, lack of job opportunities, high levels of illiteracy, inadequate life skills; the youth are most affected as many have experienced displacement due to conflict, others have lost years of education, and/or feel dis-empowered.<sup>1</sup>

**Background on peaceful cohesion initiatives in South Sudan** - Various interventions aimed at preventing, mitigating, and resolving inter-communal fighting in order to improve community security and protect civilians have been implemented by the government, the humanitarian community and UNMISS. Through the creation, strengthening and operationalization of local peace infrastructure, it has been possible to foster dialogue, build confidence among communities as an effective mechanism to prevent further violence and to create a conducive environment for reconciliation, stability and durable peaceful coexistence. For example, in Yambio, the creation of local peace infrastructure led by women in close coordination with the community<sup>2</sup> has enabled local actors to take leadership in promoting dialogue and building confidence between perceived rival communities across ethnic divides to prevent violence, thus creating an environment where civilians are safer.

Protection partners have collaborated with varied organizations on peace and social cohesion efforts. These include inter-alia the conduct of peace sensitization in urban and rural areas including cattle camps across the country, trainings on conflict management and resolution to local peace committees, community peace dialogues between warring factions in various states, and inter-state peace conferences as well as migration and pre-migration conferences. The creation of the unique Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) community based structure<sup>3</sup> to strengthen protection especially among the most vulnerable such as women, youths and children, strengthening of local conflict mitigation capacities, community security, monitoring, assessments and situational awareness through EVER, rumour control, inter-communal exchanges, mostly focusing on hard to reach hot-spot areas are significant examples. A good example of inter-state migration conferences is one held among the states of Gok, Terekeka, Amadi, Eastern and Western lakes, Tonj States and Jonglei in March 2019 in Rumbek to discuss cross-border security and regulate cattle migration. Other activities by varied humanitarian actors including UNMISS comprise of the establishment of peace and human rights clubs in schools, support to civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations to mitigate inter-communal violence and consolidate

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<sup>1</sup> More than half (51%) of South Sudanese population is below age 18 and 72 percent of South Sudanese are younger than age 30.

<sup>2</sup> Established by Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP)

<sup>3</sup> Established by Non-violent Peaceforce (NP)



peace, dissemination and sensitization on the revitalized peace agreement, and implementation of community projects in communities to strengthen and encourage co-existence and stabilization.

In all initiatives undertaken, successes and setbacks have been registered in equal measure. The end result of most of these peace and social cohesion initiatives is often a pledge by all parties to live in peace to enhance the protection of civilians. The major setback, however, is often a relapse in hostilities between previously reconciled parties, or the ignition of new hostilities between previously peaceful communities or bordering states; a factor that has created an endless cycle of violence across the country. When old conflicts break out, previous peace agreements are distorted resulting in severe loss of lives and properties as well as the reversal of many of these gains. For most partners, this has meant a continuous and repeated expenditure of resources to resolve the same conflicts or issues all over.

**The Peace and Social Cohesion Challenge** - Mapping of existing local peacebuilding efforts in South Sudan has shown that various mechanisms such as Peace Committees, technical committee, the Peace Conferences, the Inter-Church (Faith) Committees, peace education, community radio, and various activities for social cohesion are the predominant local mechanisms to promote and facilitate peacebuilding. The mapping concluded that all these mechanisms have generated positive impact on the peacebuilding process in communities where they are used<sup>4</sup>. However, despite the existence of many local mechanisms for strengthening social cohesion and peace consolidation, current social cohesion activities are implemented rather randomly in the country due to lack of effective coordination and little longer-term strategy. Furthermore, various effects of the mechanisms at the community level have only limited impact on the national social cohesion process. The links between national and local social cohesion initiatives are not optimized. Effective collaboration within the peace and social cohesion architecture does not exist in a systematic manner.

It is imperative to understand that some issues of communal conflict are deeply embedded in culture and whilst it is necessary to embark on social cohesion activities, such activities take time to build and to witness positive outcomes. Knowledge and analysis collected by a number of different peace and social cohesion actors must be shared among stakeholders to ensure momentum for joint programming and efficient use of resources including with development actors. Short-term programming and planning associated with the emergency mentality underpinning interventions and project funding, do not help in required longer term interventions. Lack of coordination and network of peacebuilding and development actors hampers efficient and effective intervention in resolution of communal conflict.

**Entry Points for Peace and Social Cohesion Programming-** More needs to be done at the local and state level to strengthen social cohesion. Investing more on local peace and social cohesion will secure some transformational results. Even following an initial political settlement at the national level and assuming its further implementation, this does not guarantee that it translates automatically into peace at the local level. The political dynamic at state level is also a factor that influences the role and capacity of state or other authorities to single-handedly resolve inter-communal conflicts, and therefore require the support and collaboration of external stakeholders including partners from the Protection Cluster to strengthen social cohesion as a deterrence for further violence as a protection strategy. While a lot has been done to support dialogues and reconciliation initiatives as discussed above, the lack of follow-up of social cohesion initiatives to strengthen outcomes provides a good entry point for protection cluster members. Thus engagement of local authorities, community leaders, as well as different age, gender and diversity groups in the community at the grassroots level should be the main entry points for development peace and social cohesion programming.

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<sup>4</sup> See Mapping of a Mapping of Community-based Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Mechanisms in South Sudan (2017)



### **Recommendations to strengthen social cohesion activities include:**

- a) **Be conflict-sensitive:** In insecure environments, the design and implementation of responses must be based on an analysis of local conflict dynamics. For example, in a context of conflict between communities, there may be a risk of making one community more vulnerable to attack by its neighbours, especially risky to refugee/IDP returnees, women headed household and children, unless interventions are targeted at both communities simultaneously. A conflict sensitive approach is needed that ensures that interventions at a minimum ‘do no harm’ and go further to address root causes of conflict and insecurity.
- b) **Trust by communities as a mediator:** The humanitarian community has a long history of working with local communities and have developed good relations with the local community and stakeholders. Social cohesion initiatives would include:
  - Facilitate intra- and inter-communal peace dialogue to build consensus on issues of reconciliation; facilitate local dialogue to promote infrastructure for peace, ensure sustainable return (especially in return sites) and discussion on a social contract<sup>5</sup> will contribute to safer communities and increased protection for civilians.
  - Facilitate the resolution of land conflicts through strengthening traditional dispute resolution mechanisms and including advocacy with state authorities and other peace partners, by providing strong, sensitive HLP (housing and land property) programming for host communities and IDPs/returnees.
  - Provide support through awareness raising and advocacy to state authorities and other partners to ensure displaced and returnee populations and women in particular are not subject to discrimination in relation to access to land and resources.
- c) **Continuous situational monitoring, assessments, and response** to return, relocation and integration areas and other hot-spot areas to show protective presence and deter violence, hot-spot mapping, patrols, identification of new and emerging conflict trends and dynamics to provide quality and timely information to inform further protection and social cohesion programming.
- d) **Capacity building of local actors to create safer communities and enhance protection of civilians:**
  - Build capacities of existent local peace committees, women, youth and traditional leaders to resolve conflicts peacefully.
  - Support local and traditional mechanisms in addressing inter-communal conflicts
  - Awareness raising on Small arms and Light weapons (SALW) and advocacy for comprehensive disarmament
- e) **Support to local peace initiatives:** Through constant community and local authorities’ engagement and relationship building, it is pivotal to proactively identify and support local peace initiatives that promote dialogue, reconciliation, confidence building and violence prevention, since these represent opportunities to strengthen local peace infrastructure building on local ownership and sustainability.
- f) **Continue monitoring the impact of past initiatives:** Past successful initiatives by various partners need to be recognized and strengthened through continued engagement with different stakeholders, peace sensitization, and encouragement of co-existing communities not to relapse into conflict. Past engagements that were not successful require reassessment and new attempts using different approaches. This is because peace and social cohesion is a process and the gains from any initiative may not be immediately visible.

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<sup>5</sup> The agreement between parties on the need to uphold and implement the resolutions from community dialogues to promote safer communities. It also means having an understanding between the rights holders and the duty bearers that necessary basic and social services will be provided to support implementation of local peace agreements.



- g) **Psychosocial and Trauma Healing:** Integrate psychosocial and trauma healing in peacebuilding by supporting women groups and inter-faith to facilitate truth telling/trauma healing sessions to promote reconciliation.
- h) Through leadership of Protection Cluster ensure, where necessary, that there is **positive alignment between local social cohesion efforts and wider national peace process**. This would entail creating an interaction platform between local committees with national CSO, Activists from Women Movements, and members of the national legislature among other national actors.
- i) **Combine community security and social cohesion (CSSC)** – Integrating social cohesion into community security programmes helps to ensure that they address issues of social exclusion that are often the root causes of insecurity. For example, if the lack of employment opportunities for one ethnic group is causing community tension, then vocational training could be targeted at this disadvantaged group. If the lack of social opportunities for youth is increasing violence between gangs, then a social cohesion approach could support sports or music events that bring together different groups and create outlets for tensions whilst providing opportunities for contact and building bridges. A social cohesion perspective would also encourage political action to ensure that all groups participate in decision-making structures.<sup>6</sup>
- j) **Integrated approach to security and development** – The factors that make communities insecure are often a combination of security issues (e.g. lack of trust in the security infrastructure or the availability of small arms) and developmental ones (e.g. lack of livelihoods, unsafe/insecure urban conditions and lack of, or unequal, access to clean water). Experience shows there is a need to address these in an integrated way. Social cohesion programs should also go beyond purely humanitarian interventions and synergies with development actors should be pursued immediately. It is essential to link up with the UN Country Framework (UNCF) 2019-2021 to build synergies as the UNCF outlines the strategic objectives of the UN Development System in South Sudan to support resilience and recovery efforts in the country as well as capacity building and institution building.
- k) **The role of youth** – Recognizing the unique roles of youth and of women is important to achieve transformative peace. Building their capacity to manage conflict, ensuring their ownership of such processes, and helping them expand their choices through education, livelihoods opportunities, and civic awareness and participation will ensure inclusiveness.
- l) **Targeting livelihoods** - The lack of economic opportunities for young people and other vulnerable groups is a cause of insecurity. Literacy and skills-training including employment opportunities can target youth at risk of becoming involved in violence. It can also provide dependable substitutes to violence. Livelihood interventions are also important in post-conflict contexts to provide reintegration opportunities for former combatants.

*The provided recommendation list is non-exhaustive and any peaceful cohesion initiative should be context and area based specific.*

For more guidance and information, please contact the Protection Cluster at [protectionclustersouthsudan@gmail.com](mailto:protectionclustersouthsudan@gmail.com)

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/thailand/docs/CommSecandSocialCohesion.pdf>