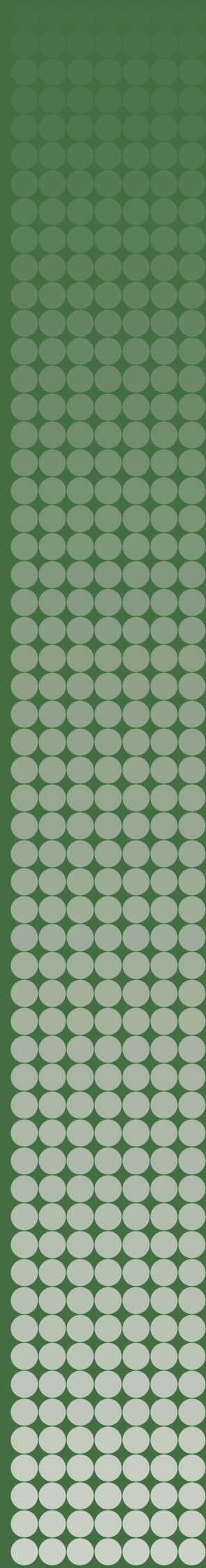


# **TOWARDS HUMANITARIAN ACTION THAT INTENTIONALLY PROMOTES PEACE IN SOUTH SUDAN**

**SIMONE BUNSE, CAROLINE DELGADO AND  
MARIE RIQUIER**



**STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL  
PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

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June 2024



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## Preface

The alignment of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts in conflict settings is not a novel concept. Coordination among relevant agencies and actors in such environments has been unfolding over two decades. Since 2018 SIPRI has partnered with humanitarian organizations, including the World Food Programme and the Swedish Red Cross, that are dedicating resources to exploring how their programming can promote peace relying on SIPRI's independent, rigorous research. While the practical implementation of humanitarian–development–peacebuilding alignment has been frustratingly slow, it would be wrong to give up on the promise of multi-sectoral, integrated approaches to foster sustainable development and peace.

While humanitarian actors may not be traditional peacebuilders, this study offers critical insights into how peacebuilding can be incorporated into humanitarian programming in South Sudan. It thus makes a valuable addition to the growing body of evidence that principled, conflict-sensitive humanitarian interventions can significantly contribute to peace prospects. Moreover, by addressing both immediate needs and the underlying causes of conflict, these efforts can have measurable impacts. Indeed, the authors emphasize the pivotal role of rebuilding trust and community networks as a cornerstone for any possibility of an enduring peace in South Sudan.

The authors perform an invaluable service by providing concrete, actionable recommendations to enhance programmatic efforts toward this goal. This is not to minimize the challenges of working across the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus with practical results. Integrated approaches may stretch strict interpretations of humanitarian mandates and principles. They may also require navigating the experimental nature of peacebuilding. But if the peacebuilding and development challenges are not taken up, humanitarian action will be endless, caring for the same beneficiaries year after year. Given the complexity and interconnected nature of today's challenges, which transcend South Sudan's borders, this work is more pressing than ever. It should be of interest to those who are interested in all aspects of the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus and in what to do to improve the response to the combined challenges of conflict, hunger and climate change.

Dan Smith  
Director, SIPRI  
Stockholm, June 2024

## Summary

Humanitarian action that promotes peace and addresses the root causes of conflict as part of a broader crisis-response model is crucial to enhancing food security and community resilience in South Sudan. In the conflict-prone Upper Nile state, the Humanitarian Response (HR) Project of the Malakal branch of the South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC) has the potential to promote peaceful coexistence and social cohesion. However, any possible peace impact of the project is currently a positive side effect, rather than an intentional response to or consequence of openings for peacebuilding.

Four theories of change can guide intentional peace promotion through the SSRC's humanitarian action. The first relates to stronger livelihood opportunities and keeping children in school. The second concerns enhanced connectedness between diverse ethnicities and communities through conflict-sensitive volunteerism. The third consists in helping the transition of socialized programme volunteers into leadership roles for greater transformational impacts. The fourth involves vertical and horizontal integration with broader development and peacebuilding efforts. Social cohesion could increase if the HR Project has measurable impact in these four areas.

The following actionable recommendations for the SSRC would strengthen its peacebuilding impact while upholding the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. They concern project design, partnership and advocacy efforts, project processes, and the intentional prevention of conflict and promotion of peace as part of humanitarian action.

Regarding the design of the HR Project, the SSRC should

- combine emergency aid distributions with longer-term interventions that span the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors;
- enhance climate-resilient farming practices, pest and flood protection, and nature-based solutions and promote group farming for productivity gains and peacebuilding; and
- use baseline and monitoring surveys to track the effects of aid on income, school enrolment and attendance, child marriage decisions, and community relations, focusing on both boys and girls.

Regarding partnerships and advocacy, the SSRC should

- partner with initiatives for school feeding, water access and menstrual hygiene to keep children in school and create safer school environments; and
- focus advocacy efforts on overcrowded schools, teacher availability, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) access, land issues, and other humanitarian needs and inequities in Upper Nile.

Regarding processes, the SSRC should

- ensure that the activities of HR Project volunteers showcase diversity and non-discrimination while maintaining conflict sensitivity and volunteer safety;
- retain diverse groups of HR Project volunteers long enough to build bonds and solidarity within and between them and their communities;

- track the effects of volunteering on social cohesion through surveys and observations, monitoring changes in community attitudes and behaviour over time;
- train HR Project volunteers for community leadership roles to promote peaceful coexistence beyond the project cycle and support their development aspirations by connecting them to skill-building programmes;
- create a network for current and former volunteers for knowledge exchange, professional opportunities and community building, inspired by alumni networks like those of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); and
- monitor volunteers' professional paths and assess broader social, economic and political impacts through community surveys.

To intentionally prevent conflict and promote peace, the SSRC should

- clarify its peace ambitions, distinguishing between 'do no harm' social cohesion interventions and active peace-promoting activities;
- deepen engagement with the IFRC's community resilience framework, focusing on social cohesion, adapting tools to assess resilience, and enhancing data collection and assessment;
- improve conflict analysis to ensure sensitivity to and understanding of community experiences as well as dynamic conflict contexts;
- link grassroots peacebuilding initiatives with broader national and international efforts for vertical integration;
- map actors working on sustainable peace conditions to align efforts on education, land access and basic services; and
- put community needs, conflict prevention and sustainable impacts at the centre of horizontal and vertical integration efforts.



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Sincere gratitude also goes to the focus group participants, Red Cross volunteers, civil society representatives, local community leaders, public authorities, and all other humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors who shared their experiences and invaluable insights with the research team.

Finally, the authors extend their appreciation to the internal and external reviewers and SIPRI's editors for their contributions to improving the manuscript.

## Abbreviations

HR	Humanitarian Response (Project)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
POC	Protection of civilians
SSRC	South Sudan Red Cross
TOC	Theory of change
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene

# 1. Introduction

South Sudan is among the world's five most pressing hunger hotspots.<sup>1</sup> In 2023 it also ranked as the fourth least peaceful country.<sup>2</sup> Despite various national and local peace agreements since 2011, humanitarian emergencies are chronic after years of conflict and subnational inter-communal violence.<sup>3</sup> Food insecurity globally and in South Sudan is driven by violent conflict, climate-related pressures and economic shocks. Agricultural yields steadily declined during South Sudan's 2013–18 civil war and climate pressures are having a severe impact on livelihoods, food production and drinking water supply.<sup>4</sup> Since 2022, economic shocks related to the Covid-19 pandemic and the ripple effects of the Russia–Ukraine War have replaced conflict as the most important driver of acute food crises in South Sudan, with 7 out of 10 people living in extreme poverty.<sup>5</sup> Interlinked and mutually reinforcing, these drivers of food insecurity help explain why almost 2.4 million South Sudanese were internally displaced in 2024.<sup>6</sup>

In this setting, humanitarian assistance, including food aid, is a first-line response to alleviate suffering. However, in order to enhance the effectiveness of aid, address the complexity of crisis drivers in South Sudan and stem the country's chronic food insecurity, policymakers, aid practitioners and researchers increasingly see integrated approaches that align humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts as a way forward.<sup>7</sup> Humanitarian actors—such as the international Red Cross and Red Crescent movement—are thus exploring how to work across the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus, including by promoting peaceful coexistence and social cohesion (see box 1.1).

Given its fundamental principles (including impartiality and neutrality), the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement does not engage in peace processes in active conflict situations.<sup>8</sup> Instead, its focus is on 'everyday peace' involving decisions made by individuals and communities as they navigate their day-to-day environment.<sup>9</sup> This paper therefore understands peacebuilding as engaging with the community and its daily experiences and as relationship-forging within spaces lost to conflict.<sup>10</sup> This differs

<sup>1</sup> World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), *Hunger Hotspots: FAO–WFP Early Warnings on Acute Food Insecurity November 2023 to April 2024 Outlook* (WFP/FAO: Rome, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Peace Index 2023* (Institute for Economics & Peace: Sydney, June 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, 17 Aug. 2015; Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, 12 Sep. 2018; and various other local peace agreements between 2011 and 2022 available from the University of Edinburgh, Peace Agreements Database, <[https://www.peaceagreements.org/search?SearchForm\[country\\_entity\]=127](https://www.peaceagreements.org/search?SearchForm[country_entity]=127)>. See also Boswell, A., *Do Local Peace Deals Work? Evidence from South Sudan's Civil War* (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung: Kampala, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), *South Sudan: Emergency Livelihood Response Programme 2021–2023* (FAO: Juba, 2021); and de Coning, C. et al., 'South Sudan', Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet, NUPI and SIPRI, Mar. 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Food Security Information Network (FSIN) and Global Network Against Food Crises, *Global Report on Food Crises 2024* (FSIN: Rome, 2024); and World Bank, *Macro Poverty Outlook* (World Bank: Washington, DC, Apr. 2024), pp. 286–87.

<sup>6</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'South Sudan situation', [n.d.].

<sup>7</sup> Bunse, S. and Delgado, C., 'Promoting peace through climate-resilient food security initiatives', SIPRI Research Policy Paper, Feb. 2024.

<sup>8</sup> ICRC, *The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: In Brief* (ICRC: Geneva, Aug. 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Mac Ginty, R. and Firchow, P., 'Top-down and bottom-up narratives of peace and conflict', *Politics*, vol. 36, no. 3 (Aug. 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Berents, H. and McEvoy-Levy, S., 'Theorising youth and everyday peace(building)', *Peacebuilding*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2015); and Richmond, O. P., 'Becoming liberal, unbecoming liberalism: Liberal–local hybridity via the everyday as a response to the paradoxes of liberal peacebuilding', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2009).

**Box 1.1. The concept of social cohesion within the international Red Cross and Red Crescent movement**

The international Red Cross and Red Crescent movement consists of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. These three entities are united by seven fundamental principles: the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence and voluntary service, unity and universality.

While they are not peacebuilders, their strategic goals stress the promotion of peaceful communities and their collective responsibility to maintain peace. Despite considering social cohesion as an ‘elusive concept’ and defining it in different ways, they all see it as crucial for community resilience, peace and sustainable impact.<sup>a</sup>

**International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

The IFRC is an international organization that (a) works towards strengthening the capacity of national societies; (b) aids national societies in advocacy, dissemination and communication with authorities to enhance understanding of their auxiliary role and the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement; (c) coordinates the response of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement to the climate crisis, disasters, health and well-being, migration, and displacement, and the movement’s efforts to build ‘peaceful, safe and inclusive societies’; and (d) represents the interests of at-risk communities globally.<sup>b</sup>

The IFRC emphasizes the importance of social cohesion in identifying and addressing community needs and priorities. It sees social cohesion as the ‘tolerance of, and respect for, diversity . . . both institutionally and individually’.<sup>c</sup>

**International Committee of the Red Cross**

The ICRC is an independent, neutral organization. Based on the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, the statutes of the international Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, and the resolutions of the international conferences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the ICRC (a) ensures humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and violence; (b) responds to emergencies; (c) seeks to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening respect for international humanitarian law and its integration into national law; and (d) directs and coordinates the international activities of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

The ICRC interprets social cohesion as a community’s willingness to ‘cooperate with each other to better cope with threats and improve resilience’.<sup>d</sup>

**National Red Cross and Red Crescent societies**

National societies exist in nearly every country in the world, each consisting of a network of community-based volunteers and staff. They provide different services depending on the needs of a community and its relationships with public authorities. Given their community presence, national societies are sometimes the ‘only organization able to operate in a country experiencing disasters, conflicts, or a collapse in their social fabric’.<sup>e</sup>

The many national societies do not share a single definition of social cohesion.

<sup>a</sup> IFRC, *Applying Better Programming Initiative—Do No Harm* (IFRC: Geneva, 2016), p. 24.

<sup>b</sup> IFRC, *Global Plan 2024* (IFRC: Geneva, 2023), p. 7.

<sup>c</sup> IFRC (note a), p. 24.

<sup>d</sup> Cotroneo, A. and Pawlak, M., ‘Community-based protection: The ICRC approach’, *Forced Migration Review*, no. 53 (Oct. 2016).

<sup>e</sup> IFRC, ‘About national societies’, [n.d.].

from traditional peacebuilding, which is focused on state-building and good governance, or security initiatives such as high-level political dialogues or peace operations.<sup>11</sup>

Social cohesion, in turn, is seen as an integral part of peace and crucial to achieving social and economic goals in multi-ethnic and multi-religious countries fractured by conflict. Societies with high levels of social cohesion are more peaceful than societies with low levels of social cohesion. This is because ‘trust in others, and acceptance of diversity’ is higher; the degree to which people ‘identify with the community’ and ‘trust . . . in society’s institutions’ is higher; people’s belief ‘that social conditions are just’ is higher; and ‘people’s willingness to take responsibility for others and the community’ is higher.<sup>12</sup> As such, sustained peace is not possible without a degree of social cohesion.<sup>13</sup> In South Sudan, social cohesion between and within communities broke down as a consequence of the civil war.<sup>14</sup>

Social cohesion is part of the resilience frameworks of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), which see it as ‘the extent to which people draw on informal and formal community networks of support to identify problems, needs and opportunities, establish priorities, and act for the good and inclusion of all in the community’ (see also box 1.1).<sup>15</sup>

Considering this background, this paper analyses the contribution of the largest national humanitarian organization in South Sudan, the South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC), to promoting peace and social cohesion.<sup>16</sup> It does so by focusing on the Humanitarian Response (HR) Project of the SSRC’s branch in Malakal, Upper Nile—a state especially vulnerable to inter-communal conflict, natural disasters and loss of livelihoods. The paper seeks to deepen the SSRC’s understanding of how to respond to food security crises in an integrated way that prevents conflicts, and it offers recommendations to the SSRC on how to promote peace and strengthen social cohesion.

The analysis relies on fieldwork conducted in Malakal and Kodok in Upper Nile and in the capital, Juba, in early 2024, as well as a review of the literature and organizational documents. Data was collected through 27 semi-structured interviews, six focus group discussions and two workshops (see appendix A for a list of interviewees and focus group participants). The methodology and its limitations are outlined in box 1.2.

The paper continues in chapter 2 by examining the roles of humanitarian actors in reducing tensions and defusing the causes of conflict; the frameworks they can rely on to do so; and the challenges that this presents. Chapter 3 then provides deeper insight into South Sudan’s humanitarian crisis in Upper Nile, while chapter 4 analyses the SSRC’s HR Project and how it could intentionally focus on conflict prevention and peace promotion by developing four theories of change (TOCs). The paper concludes in chapter 5 with actionable recommendations to strengthen the potential of the HR Project to promote peace and by highlighting broader lessons regarding principled humanitarian action that intentionally promotes peace and prevents conflict.

<sup>11</sup> Campbell, S. P., *Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2018); and Böttcher, C. and Wittkowsky, A., *Give ‘P’ a Chance: Peacebuilding, Peace Operations and the HDP Nexus* (Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF): Berlin, Dec. 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Walkenhorst, P., ‘What holds Asian societies together?’, Asia policy brief, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Mar. 2018, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Liaga, E. A. and Wielenga, C., ‘Social cohesion from the top-down or bottom-up? The cases of South Sudan and Burundi’, *Peace & Change*, vol. 45, no. 3 (July 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Liaga and Wielenga (note 13).

<sup>15</sup> IFRC, *Road Map to Community Resilience v2: Operationalising the Framework for Community Resilience through the Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (EVCA)* (IFRC: Geneva, 2021), p. 49.

<sup>16</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC), *Strategic Plan 2022–2026* (SSRC: Juba, [n.d.]).

**Box 1.2. Methodological considerations**

Several methodological considerations underlie this paper. Upper Nile was chosen as a focus area given that it is the state where peaceful coexistence among various ethnic and tribal groups is most precarious.<sup>a</sup> The Humanitarian Response (HR) Project of the South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC) is the biggest ongoing project supported by the Swedish Red Cross in the region, although food security plays a smaller role in the HR Project than in other projects supported by the Swedish Red Cross in other parts of the country.

A total of 79 people were consulted for this study: 16 staff of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, 11 Red Cross volunteers, 38 community leaders and aid recipients, 7 other humanitarian stakeholders, 6 public officials, and 1 independent expert (see appendix A). Staff of the Swedish Red Cross, the SSRC and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also participated in two workshops, one before and one after the fieldwork. To aid the selection of the project and area to be examined, the first workshop, held online on 14 November 2023, focused on the country context and Swedish Red Cross's projects in South Sudan. The second workshop, held in hybrid form on 13 March 2024 in Stockholm, consisted of a discussion of preliminary results with the relevant stakeholders in order to aid the generation of feasible recommendations.

Among the potential methodological limitations is that community focus group discussion included only aid recipients. It was therefore impossible to compare their insights with non-recipients of aid. No representative from the South Sudanese Ministry of Peacebuilding was available for interview. As one focus group with women fell through unexpectedly because of a food distribution by a humanitarian actor, there is an imbalance in the focus group input between men (32) and women (17). Overall, more men (55) than women (24) contributed insights for this study. While an effort was made to include the most recent information, some data (particularly concerning population movements) is constantly shifting or hard to obtain. In addition, not all data is available for Upper Nile. Where possible, data from the municipal level (mainly Malakal and Kodok) was identified. None of these limitations detract from the large evidence base on which this paper draws.

<sup>a</sup> UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 'Attacks against civilians in Greater Upper Nile, South Sudan August to December 2022', Dec. 2023.

## 2. Food security and peace promotion: Roles and challenges for humanitarian actors

There is a growing body of evidence that recognizes the potential contribution that humanitarian action can make to generating conditions conducive to peace.<sup>17</sup> While humanitarian actors are not peacebuilders, most humanitarian efforts occur in conflict-affected countries. Building on the existing literature, this chapter therefore analyses how humanitarian actors can reduce tensions; what humanitarian action that promotes peace and prevents conflict might look like; and what programmatic approaches and frameworks humanitarians can rely on to defuse the causes of conflict.<sup>18</sup>

Humanitarian actors, such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, do not engage in formal peace processes between armed actors. But they can contribute to enhancing the prospects for peace as part of their strategies to avoid aid dependency and for a responsible and sustainable humanitarian exit and transition.<sup>19</sup> Many countries where humanitarian actors are most engaged remain in a state of neither war nor peace.<sup>20</sup> Marked by recurring violence, high insecurity and broken peace arrangements, conflicts are increasingly protracted. They also intersect with other drivers of humanitarian needs, such as climate pressures and economic shocks. It is therefore hard to distinguish between humanitarian and developmental needs.<sup>21</sup> As their operating environment becomes increasingly complex, there is a recognition that humanitarian actors must combine short-term life-saving humanitarian response with longer-term developmental and conflict-prevention approaches in order to address root causes, to foster community resilience, and to reduce risk, vulnerability and need.<sup>22</sup>

The mandates of actors working in and on conflict differ, determining how each can work on peace. Some, like United Nations peace operations, have internationally recognized legal mandates that may include supporting the implementation of peace processes. Others, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), have internationally recognized legal mandates that specifically ask them to stay out of direct engagement in peace processes. Yet others, including many non-governmental and community-based organizations, are self-mandated.<sup>23</sup> Their mandates differ according to the organization's specialization (e.g. food security, health, education, humanitarian

<sup>17</sup> Muguruza, C. C., 'Human security as the link between humanitarian action and peacebuilding', eds P. Gibbons and H. J. Heintze, *The Humanitarian Challenge* (Springer: Cham, 2015); Debarre, A., 'Humanitarian action and sustaining peace', Issue brief, International Peace Institute, Mar. 2018; Brown, S., Mena, R. and Brown, S., 'The peace dilemma in the triple nexus: Challenges and opportunities for the humanitarian-development-peace approach', *Development in Practice*, Published online 19 Apr. 2024; Panter-Brick, C., 'Resilience humanitarianism and peacebuilding', ed. M. Unger, *Multisystemic Resilience: Adaptation and Transformation in Contexts of Change* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2021); and Ferris, E., 'The humanitarian-peace nexus', Research briefing paper, UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, Aug. 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Ernstorfer, A., Stockman, A.-S. and de Weijer, F., 'Peace responsiveness: A paradigm shift to deliver on conflict sensitivity and sustaining peace', *Development in Practice*, vol. 33, no. 5 (2023).

<sup>19</sup> UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), *Mapping Good Practice in the Implementation of Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Approaches*, Synthesis report, IASC Results Group 4 (IASC: Geneva, Sep. 2021); and Tull, K., 'Responsible exit from humanitarian interventions', K4D Helpdesk Report no. 791, Institute of Development Studies, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Öjendal, J. et al., 'Introduction—Peacebuilding amidst violence', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2021).

<sup>21</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF), 'A modernized crisis-response model', Room Document no. 3, INCAF Director-Level Meeting, 6–7 July 2023 (unpublished).

<sup>22</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *OCHA's Strategic Plan 2023–2026: Transforming Humanitarian Coordination* (OCHA: New York, 2023).

<sup>23</sup> Slim, H. and Bradley, M., 'Principled humanitarian action & ethical tensions in multi-mandate organizations in armed conflict: Observations from a rapid literature review', World Vision, 2013; and Interview nos 10 and 11.



or development) and target demographics. Some organizations are dual-mandated, engaged in both humanitarian and development assistance. In addition, it is important to distinguish between principled humanitarian action and pure relief assistance. Principled humanitarian action is based on upholding humanitarian principles or, in the case of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, the movement's fundamental principles and a commitment to 'do no harm'. Pure relief assistance may be underpinned by political, military or economic objectives.<sup>24</sup> While these varied mandates offer flexibility to adapt to evolving circumstances, they can also lead to conflicting priorities, reducing operational coherence, impact and effectiveness.<sup>25</sup>

Recognition of the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus emerged in response to the difficulties of providing aid in conflict settings and to enhance aid effectiveness through enhanced coordination.<sup>26</sup> The nexus underscores the importance of addressing immediate needs coherently and in a connected manner. This means aligning humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities to work towards collective outcomes and avoiding fragmented project- and output-based programming.<sup>27</sup>

Incorporating the peace element into humanitarian action has proven to be difficult.<sup>28</sup> Humanitarian actors have three key concerns about the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus. The first relates to balancing access to address immediate needs with broader transformative agendas.<sup>29</sup> The second concerns the fear of prioritizing state security over adherence to international humanitarian law and the humanitarian principles.<sup>30</sup> The third has to do with divergent understandings of what peacebuilding entails. Humanitarian actors typically see peacebuilding as grassroots and community-driven, emphasizing social cohesion and peaceful coexistence. In contrast, governments and the UN Security Council prioritize state-centric initiatives. These concerns hinder integrating peacebuilding elements into humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus programming.<sup>31</sup>

### Humanitarian action that promotes peace and prevents conflict

Despite these concerns, principled humanitarian action has an important role to play in achieving sustainable peace. A growing body of research demonstrates that humanitarian food security interventions can play a particularly important role in enhancing

<sup>24</sup> McGoldrick, C., 'The state of conflicts today: Can humanitarian action adapt?', *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 97, no. 900 (Dec. 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Slim and Bradley (note 23); and Interview nos 10 and 11.

<sup>26</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *The Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus Interim Progress Review* (OECD: Paris, 2022); UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 'The grand bargain (official website)', [n.d.]; Fitzpatrick, M. et al., *Making the Nexus Real: Moving from Theory to Practice* (Tufts University, Feinstein International Center: Boston, MA, Dec. 2021); DuBois, M., *The Triple Nexus: Threat or Opportunity for the Humanitarian Principles?* (Centre for Humanitarian Action: Berlin, May 2020); 'The ICRC and the "humanitarian–development–peace nexus" discussion—In conversation with Filipa Schmitz Guinote, ICRC policy adviser', *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 101, no. 912 (Dec. 2019); and Südhoff, R., Hövelmann, S. and Steinke, A., *The Triple Nexus in Practice: Challenges and Options for Multi-mandated Organisations* (Centre for Humanitarian Action: Berlin, Oct. 2020).

<sup>27</sup> Fanning, E. and Fullwood-Thomas, F., *The Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus: What Does It Mean for Multi-mandated Organisations?* (Oxfam: Oxford, June 2019).

<sup>28</sup> Weishaupt, S., *The Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus: Towards Differentiated Configurations*, UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) Working Paper no. 2020-8 (UNRISD: Geneva, Sep. 2020); and Tschunkert, K. et al., 'Financing food security: Promises and pitfalls of the humanitarian–development–peace nexus in South Sudan', SIPRI Research Policy Paper, Jan. 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP), 'The humanitarian–development–peace nexus: Current status and discourse', June 2023; and DuBois (note 26).

<sup>30</sup> Böttcher and Wittkowsky (note 11); Thomas, M., *NGO Perspectives on the EU's Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus Approach: Exploring the Challenges and Opportunities* (Voice: Brussels, Oct. 2019); and Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas (note 27).

<sup>31</sup> Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas (note 27).



the prospects for peace across diverse conflict contexts.<sup>32</sup> This relates to the intrinsic linkages that exist between food, climate pressures and conflict. These interventions offer the opportunity to turn vicious circles into virtuous ones in which food security is enhanced, climate- and environment-related stress reduced, conflict managed, and peace promoted.<sup>33</sup>

Peacebuilding requires the engagement of a wide range of actors at the community, state, national and international levels.<sup>34</sup> It aims to instigate transformations at various levels: within individuals (e.g. changing attitudes and behaviours), in interpersonal relationships (including improvements in communication and interaction), within institutional frameworks (addressing policies and practices that marginalize specific groups) and at a cultural level (combating discriminatory attitudes that span communities).<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, peacebuilding aims to create an environment in which differences and disputes can be resolved in a non-violent manner.<sup>36</sup>

Building and sustaining peace involves conflict prevention before, during and after conflict. Prevention efforts continue during conflict to mitigate violence and prevent its escalation. Humanitarian action can play a pivotal role during conflict by assisting communities to resolve conflicting interests or concerns peacefully, thus contributing to reducing overall violence.<sup>37</sup> Preventative action is equally important when conflict has ended but peace is fragile. Upper Nile is a case in point, as illustrated in chapter 3.

The close engagement of humanitarian actors with conflict-affected populations enables them to develop localized, relationship-focused initiatives that can promote peaceful coexistence within and between communities. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of how conflict and peace are perceived and lived by those directly impacted by it.<sup>38</sup> It also fosters trust, aligns peacebuilding with the needs of conflict-affected populations, and enhances the credibility of humanitarian actors with local, national and international stakeholders. Such an approach aligns with the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement's commitment to community engagement and accountability.<sup>39</sup> Simply put, community engagement brings people together to discuss and debate; if people do not interact, problems cannot be resolved, and tensions grow.<sup>40</sup> Humanitarian action can promote peace and prevent conflict by anticipating, mitigating and responding to conflict dynamics (see box 2.1).

<sup>32</sup> Delgado, C. et al., *The World Food Programme's Contribution to Improving the Prospects for Peace* (SIPRI: Stockholm, June 2019); Delgado, C., *The World Food Programme's Contribution to Improving the Prospects for Peace in Colombia* (SIPRI: Stockholm, Dec. 2020); Hegazi, F. et al., *The World Food Programme's Contribution to Improving the Prospects for Peace in Ethiopia* (SIPRI: Stockholm, Apr. 2022); Vernon, P. et al., *Livelihoods for Peace*, Interpeace Peacebuilding in Practice Paper no. 8 (Interpeace: Geneva, Mar. 2024); and Peace Direct, 'Livelihood support and Peacebuilding in Somalia', 28 Jan. 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Bunse and Delgado (note 7).

<sup>34</sup> Ernstorfer et al. (note 18).

<sup>35</sup> Lederach, J. P., *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (US Institute of Peace: Washington, DC, 1997).

<sup>36</sup> International Alert and Women Waging Peace, *Inclusive Security, Sustainable Peace: A Toolkit for Advocacy and Action* (Women Waging Peace: Cambridge, 2012), chapter 2; and UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), 'Exploring peace within the humanitarian–development–peace nexus (HDPN)', Issue Paper, IASC Results Group 4 on Humanitarian–Development Collaboration, Oct. 2020.

<sup>37</sup> International Alert and Women Waging Peace (note 36).

<sup>38</sup> Firchow, P., 'World peace is local peace', *Ethics & International Affairs*, vol. 34, no. 1 (spring 2020).

<sup>39</sup> Interview no. 5; and Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 'Movement-wide commitments for community engagement and accountability', Resolution CD/19/R1, 8 Dec. 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Interview no. 25.

**Box 2.1. Humanitarian action that intentionally promotes peace and prevents conflict**

Humanitarian action that intentionally promotes peace and prevents conflict involves efforts to anticipate, mitigate and respond to evolving dynamics in conflict-affected settings in a way that averts escalation of direct and structural violence and contributes to conditions that enhance the prospects for peace. Adhering to humanitarian principles, it encourages humanitarian actors to design their activities in a way that acknowledges—and, where possible, addresses—root causes of conflict, builds resilience and reduces the risk of violence. This can include early-warning systems that contribute to conflict prevention, conflict-sensitive disaster risk-reduction measures, community-based initiatives that promote social cohesion, and humanitarian diplomacy that persuades decision-makers to act in the interests of vulnerable people and in line with humanitarian principles.

In addition to lessening the impact of disasters, conflict and other crises, the goal is to be intentional and proactive in preventing conflicts and humanitarian emergencies in order to save lives and reduce suffering in both the short and longer terms. It assumes that the close engagement of humanitarian actors with crisis-affected populations can—if designed to do so—translate into localized, relationship-focused initiatives that promote peaceful coexistence within and between communities.

**Programmatic approaches and frameworks**

Analytically, conflict sensitivity is currently the starting point for prevention efforts by humanitarian actors. It involves a nuanced understanding of how introducing aid into conflict and peacebuilding environments can influence patterns of violence and expose recipients to new risks. It necessitates proactive measures to manage or alleviate conflict triggers while mitigating any adverse effects caused by the introduction of aid.<sup>41</sup> It also seeks to amplify the positive outcomes of interventions on conflict dynamics and strengthen local capacities for peace. In this way, conflict-sensitive approaches can reduce tensions by addressing inequalities and other underlying conditions that imperil peace.

Conflict-sensitive food security programming with integrated longer-term development and social cohesion dimensions offers important pathways for enhancing the prospect for peace. Examples of such integrated food security interventions include programmes that support sustainable livelihood strategies by increasing climate-resilient agricultural productivity, providing equitable access to natural resources and improving state–citizen links by including sustainably produced food in social service delivery.<sup>42</sup> Programmes that generate sustainable incomes may enhance the prospects for peace by addressing grievances related to limited economic opportunities and water scarcity, avoiding illegal survival means and destructive coping mechanisms, and supporting the transition away from aid.<sup>43</sup> In addition to assistance efforts, inequities that exacerbate tensions can also be addressed by protection efforts (i.e. the protection of human rights and related obligations under international law) without undermining the population’s capacity to protect itself.<sup>44</sup> When the design, implementation and monitoring of such activities involve the participation of all sections of communities, humanitarian action helps build (or rebuild) trust and social capital within and between communities.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Wood, R. M. and Sullivan, C., ‘Doing harm by doing good? The negative externalities of humanitarian aid provision during civil conflict’, *Journal of Politics*, vol. 77, no. 3 (July 2015); and Ernstorfer et al. (note 18).

<sup>42</sup> Delgado et al. (note 32); Delgado (note 32); Hegazi et al. (note 32); Vernon et al. (note 32); Peace Direct (note 32); and Morales Munoz, H. et al., ‘Integrating climate mitigation and environmental peacebuilding objectives through sustainable land use systems: Theory of change and indicators’, *PLOS Climate*, vol. 2, no. 5 (2023).

<sup>43</sup> Bunse and Delgado (note 7).

<sup>44</sup> Debarre (note 17).

<sup>45</sup> Delgado et al. (note 32).

In addition, humanitarian diplomacy can enhance the peacebuilding potential of food security interventions. Organizations use humanitarian diplomacy differently reflecting their different mandates and roles. Examples range from engaging with parties to armed conflicts and their sponsors to pursue humanitarian objectives to ensuring that the voices of the victims of armed conflicts are heard.<sup>46</sup> For the ICRC, humanitarian diplomacy is about persuading decision makers and opinion leaders to act at all times in the interests of vulnerable people and with full respect for its fundamental principles.<sup>47</sup>

Humanitarian actors often fear that peacebuilding compromises the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.<sup>48</sup> However, these principles were designed to empower and guide rather than rigidly regulate humanitarian action. This makes the principles subject to contextual interpretation and application.<sup>49</sup> As complete impartiality, neutrality or independence are unattainable, there are only degrees of alignment with the ideal.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the principles were conceived in a time and in response to concerns different to contemporary ones. Contemporary concerns include the intersection between climate change, environmental degradation and conflict patterns; armed conflicts increasingly taking place within and not between states, and the implications this has for garnering host state consent; and the increased protractedness of conflict.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, while humanity and impartiality are substantive ethical principles, neutrality and independence lack intrinsic moral value.<sup>52</sup> Instead, they play a purely pragmatic role in safeguarding access necessary for realising humanity and impartiality.<sup>53</sup> Recognizing this nuance, neutrality and independence can and should adapt to context, allowing flexibility in addressing challenges across diverse and evolving conflict settings.<sup>54</sup> This approach maintains the integrity of principled humanitarian action while accommodating different conflict dynamics.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent movement is well-placed to promote peace through its fundamental principles.<sup>55</sup> The IFRC's mission is to 'mobilise for inclusive and peaceful communities'.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, the ICRC's strategy for 2024–27 acknowledges a collective responsibility to advocate for peace.<sup>57</sup> Finally, promoting peaceful coexistence is among the key goals of the SSRC and the national societies supporting its work.<sup>58</sup> Thus, while principled humanitarian action with strict adherence to the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement's fundamental principles underlies the work of the SSRC, long-term peaceful outcomes, collective solidarity and change at the grassroots level of conflicts are part of its strategic goals.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Bogatyreva, O., 'Humanitarian diplomacy: Modern concepts and approaches', *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, vol. 92, suppl. no. 14 (Dec. 2022).

<sup>47</sup> Harroff-Tavel, M., 'La diplomatie humanitaire du comité international de la Croix-Rouge' [The humanitarian diplomacy of the International Committee of the Red Cross], *Relations Internationales*, no. 121 (2005).

<sup>48</sup> DuBois (note 26).

<sup>49</sup> Lie, J. H. S., 'The humanitarian–development nexus: Humanitarian principles, practice, and pragmatics', *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, vol. 5 (2020).

<sup>50</sup> DuBois (note 26).

<sup>51</sup> Lie (note 49); and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 22).

<sup>52</sup> DuBois (note 26).

<sup>53</sup> Mardini, R., 'Back to basics: humanitarian principles in contemporary armed conflict', *Humanitarian Law & Policy*, ICRC, 6 June 2022.

<sup>54</sup> DuBois (note 26); and Interview no. 9.

<sup>55</sup> ICRC (note 8).

<sup>56</sup> IFRC, *Strategy 2030: Platform for Change—Global Reach, Local Action* (IFRC: Geneva, 2018), p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> ICRC, *ICRC Strategy 2024–2027* (ICRC: Geneva, Nov. 2023), p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> E.g. German Red Cross, 'South Sudan: Creating livelihoods for women and young people', [n.d.].

<sup>59</sup> IFRC (note 56), p. 11.

### 3. The South Sudan Red Cross and the humanitarian crisis in Upper Nile

To understand the work of the SSRC, this chapter first provides deeper insight into South Sudan's current humanitarian crisis, focusing on Upper Nile state. It then analyses the pathways between food insecurity, violent conflict and climate-related pressures in Upper Nile. Finally, it introduces the SSRC's legal mandate, mission and vision to respond.

#### Humanitarian crisis overview

The current humanitarian crisis in South Sudan is protracted. Both humanitarian needs and the gap between the number of people in need and the number of people targeted by humanitarian response increased between 2020 and 2024 (see table 3.1).<sup>60</sup> Food assistance was projected to be the most pressing need between April and July 2024, followed by health, then water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and protection (see table 3.2).<sup>61</sup>

The needs are particularly severe in Upper Nile.<sup>62</sup> Despite the availability of fertile land and proximity to the White Nile and Sobat rivers, food insecurity in Upper Nile persists.<sup>63</sup> Post-harvest, from December 2023 to March 2024, 57 per cent of the population suffered from high levels of acute food insecurity.<sup>64</sup> This was expected to increase to 67 per cent in the lean season between April and July 2024.<sup>65</sup>

Upper Nile's long history of displacement explains the high vulnerability of both host communities and internally displaced people (IDPs). In June 2023 Upper Nile hosted 211 000 IDPs.<sup>66</sup> The state's capital Malakal has accommodated IDPs since the 2013 civil war, when a protection of civilians (POC) site was established there. Supervised by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the POC site was originally created for 10 000 IDPs.<sup>67</sup> By June 2023 the number of IDPs had grown to around 37 000.<sup>68</sup> As of February 2024 the city of Kodok hosted more than 11 500 IDPs.<sup>69</sup> In addition, more than 488 000 individuals crossed into Upper Nile from Sudan between the start of its civil war in April 2023 and February 2024.<sup>70</sup> Most were South Sudanese returnees (79 per cent).<sup>71</sup>

<sup>60</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan South Sudan: Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2024* (OCHA: New York, Nov. 2023).

<sup>61</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 60).

<sup>62</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 60), p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), 'Fishery and aquaculture country profiles: South Sudan', Jan. 2021.

<sup>64</sup> Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), 'South Sudan: IPC acute food insecurity and malnutrition analysis, September 2023–July 2024', 6 Nov. 2023, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (note 64), p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'South Sudan: Humanitarian Snapshot', Dec. 2022; and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'Situation report: Malakal', 23 June 2023.

<sup>67</sup> Interview no. 6.

<sup>68</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Humanitarian Response Plan South Sudan: Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2023* (OCHA: New York, Dec. 2022), p. 8; and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 60), p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRf) South Sudan, 'Malakal', County profile, [Feb. 2024]; and Interview no. 15.

<sup>70</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM), 'Population movement from Sudan to South Sudan', IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, accessed 22 Feb. 2024.

<sup>71</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees and International Organization for Migration (note 70).

**Table 3.1.** Humanitarian response trends in South Sudan, 2020–24

Figures are millions of people.

Year	No. of people in need	No. of people targeted	Difference
2020	7.5	5.6	1.9
2021	8.3	6.6	1.7
2022	8.9	6.4	2.5
2023	9.4	6.4	3.0
2024	9.0	6.0	3.0

Sources: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Humanitarian Response Plan South Sudan: Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2023* (OCHA: New York, Dec. 2022), p. 8; and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan South Sudan: Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2024* (OCHA: New York, Nov. 2023).

Upper Nile is characterized by a lack of infrastructure, poor services and limited investment in development. Few economic opportunities exist, particularly for the youth, and 66 per cent of the labour force was working in the informal sector in 2019.<sup>72</sup> Together, these factors limit connectedness within and between communities.

South Sudan ranked 173 out of 177 countries in the Women, Peace and Security Index 2023/24.<sup>73</sup> Women and children are disproportionately vulnerable to abuse and negative coping mechanisms that include skipping meals, dropping out of school, illegal child marriages and early pregnancies.<sup>74</sup> Gender-based violence is pervasive in South Sudan, with 65 per cent of women having been exposed to physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime.<sup>75</sup> In 2024, 2.5 million people in the country were at risk of gender-based violence.<sup>76</sup>

Finally, education levels are low in South Sudan, including Upper Nile, as evidenced by key recent indicators (see table 3.3). A child born in 2021 was, on average, expected to attend school for 2.9 years in Upper Nile, compared to 4.9 years in South Sudan as a whole.<sup>77</sup> Limited schooling and literacy in Upper Nile are connected to conflict, poverty, socio-cultural factors and consecutive years of flooding. Enrolment and quality of education are constrained by a lack of schools, qualified teachers and school supplies, as well as poor WASH facilities, maintenance and management of schools.<sup>78</sup>

Many schools were destroyed during the civil war. While Malakal hosted 46 schools before 2013, only half of them were functional in July 2022. In the same year, 17 per cent of schools in Upper Nile were damaged by flooding.<sup>79</sup> In 2021 there was one primary

<sup>72</sup> Yeboua, K., *South Sudan: Geographic Futures* (Institute for Security Studies: Pretoria, 13 Dec. 2023).

<sup>73</sup> Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS), *Women, Peace and Security Index 2023/24*, Summary (GIWPS: Washington, DC, Oct. 2023).

<sup>74</sup> Focus group nos 4 and 6; and Oxfam, 'The impact of food insecurity on women and girls: Research from Pibor and Akobo counties, Jonglei state, South Sudan', Technical briefing, May 2022.

<sup>75</sup> What Works Consortium, *No Safe Place: A Lifetime of Violence for Conflict-Affected Women and Girls in South Sudan* (George Washington University, Global Women's Institute: Washington, DC, 2017); and Harrop, E., *The Situation of Children and Women in South Sudan 2018–2020* (UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) South Sudan: Juba, July 2021), p. 53.

<sup>76</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'South Sudan: Living as a woman is a fight we go through daily', 28 Nov. 2023.

<sup>77</sup> UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), *Education Sector Analysis: South Sudan* (IIEP-UNESCO Dakar: Dakar, 2023).

<sup>78</sup> UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics and South Sudanese Ministry of General Education and Instruction, *Global Initiative on Out of School Children: South Sudan Country Study* (UNESCO: Paris, May 2018); and UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (note 77).

<sup>79</sup> Giri, R., 'School construction programme boosts girls' education', UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) South Sudan, 22 July 2022.



**Table 3.2.** Projected humanitarian needs in South Sudan, April–July 2024

Type of assistance	People in need (m.)	Share of total population (%)
Food	7.1	57
Health	6.3	51
WASH	5.6	45
Protection	5.5	44

WASH = Water, sanitation and hygiene.

Source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan South Sudan: Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2024* (OCHA: New York, Nov. 2023).

school for every 758 children and one secondary school for every 2570 students.<sup>80</sup> In Upper Nile there was 1 teacher for every 85 pre-primary students.<sup>81</sup>

### Humanitarian crisis drivers

South Sudan's protracted humanitarian crisis can be explained by a combination of interconnected political and security, social, and economic challenges, compounded by climate-induced flooding, droughts and population movements.<sup>82</sup> Societal divisions run deep and the country's conflict context is marked by 'political grievances, ethnic rivalry, distrust between the government and the people, an undisciplined national army, armed militias, inter-communal violence, and grave human rights issues'.<sup>83</sup> Only limited progress has been made to implement the national-level peace agreements of 2015 and 2018.<sup>84</sup>

Upper Nile hosts four of South Sudan's estimated 64 ethnic groups: the Dinka, the Mabanese, the Nuer and the Shilluk.<sup>85</sup> Peaceful coexistence among the various ethnic groups has been particularly difficult to achieve in the state.<sup>86</sup> The large-scale violence in Upper Nile since the armed conflict in 2013 has been connected to broader national-level political rivalries, interests and opportunism that transformed historical ethnic feuds into quests for power and resources.<sup>87</sup> Local armed actors serve as proxies to fight the battles of the national elites.<sup>88</sup> Although political and military alliances are mostly shaped along ethnic lines, these lines become blurred when these do not match the

<sup>80</sup> UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (note 77).

<sup>81</sup> UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (note 77).

<sup>82</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 60); and International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Floods, displacement and violence in South Sudan', [2022].

<sup>83</sup> Madut, K. K., 'Spatiality of ethnic identity and construction of sociopolitical interaction in South Sudan', *Human Geographies—Journal of Studies and Research in Human Geographies*, vol. 11, no. 2 (Nov. 2017), p. 187.

<sup>84</sup> UN Security Council, 'South Sudan recommits to revitalized peace agreement with 24-month extension, Security Council emphasizes, urging country to avoid further delays', SC/15219, 6 Mar. 2023; International Crisis Group (ICG), *Oil or Nothing: Dealing with South Sudan's Bleeding Finances*, Africa Report no. 305 (ICG: Brussels, 6 Oct. 2021); de Waal, A. et al., 'South Sudan: The politics of delay', London School of Economics and Political Science, Conflict Research Programme, 3 Dec. 2019; and Maphasa, T., *Finding Peace in Uncertain Times: South Sudan and the Revitalised Peace Process*, Occasional Paper no. 312 (South African Institute of International Affairs: Johannesburg, Sep. 2020).

<sup>85</sup> Nonviolent Peaceforce (NVP), 'Stuck in transit: Malakal and Paloch, Upper Nile state, South Sudan', Sep./Oct. 2023.

<sup>86</sup> Garcia, J. J. E. (ed.), *Surviving Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality: A Challenge for the Twenty-first Century* (Rowan & Littlefield: Oxford, 2005); Madut (note 83), p. 186; UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 'Attacks against civilians in Greater Upper Nile, South Sudan August to December 2022', Dec. 2023; and Interview no. 18.

<sup>87</sup> Franks, T., 'Malakal: The city that vanished in South Sudan', BBC, 24 Oct. 2015; Chagutah, T., 'South Sudan's conflicts are not just between communities', Amnesty International, Mar. 2023; Madut (note 83), p. 191; and Watson, D., 'Surface tensions: "Communal" violence and elite ambitions in South Sudan', Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), 19 Aug. 2021.

<sup>88</sup> Craze, J., 'Upper Nile prepares to return to war', Situation update, Small Arms Survey, Mar. 2023.

**Table 3.3.** Key education indicators in South Sudan

Figures are percentages, rounded to the nearest whole number.

Indicator	Share
Adult literacy (>15 years), South Sudan, 2023	35
Children out of school (<15 years), South Sudan, 2023	70
Boys as share of children out of school (<15 years), 2023	47
Girls as share of children out of school (<15 years), 2023	53
Children out of school, Upper Nile (primary school age), 2021	78
Boys out of school as a share of all primary school-aged boys, Upper Nile, 2021	79
Girls out of school as a share of all primary school-aged girls, Upper Nile, 2021	78
Net enrolment in primary school, South Sudan, 2023	38
Children who report having eaten before school, South Sudan, 2020	25

Sources: UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) South Sudan, ‘What we do: Education’, [n.d.]; Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, ‘South Sudan: Comprehensive action plan to end & prevent all grave violations against children signed by government’, 7 Feb. 2020; Save the Children, ‘South Sudan: Children call for education stakeholders to improve the quality of learning’, 9 Nov. 2023; and UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), *Education Sector Analysis: South Sudan* (IIEP-UNESCO Dakar: Dakar, 2023); and UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) South Sudan, ‘UNICEF and UNESCO joint statement on the commemoration of the international day of education’, 24 Jan. 2023.

strategic interests of the belligerents.<sup>89</sup> Unsurprisingly, social, political and economic nation-building has been hard.

Clashes and persisting violence in Upper Nile can partially be explained by the ongoing fragmentation of the security landscape, heightened rivalry between various armed forces, proliferation of weapons and firearms, and impunity for the perpetrators.<sup>90</sup> Conflicts over land ownership between the Shilluk and the Dinka have a long history in Upper Nile. The most recent outbreak of widespread violence in the state, in late 2022, killed 600 civilians and displaced 62 000.<sup>91</sup>

In turn, conflict-induced displacement, combined with scarce resources, is another driver of violence in Upper Nile. In June 2023 clashes in the Malakal POC site led to the death of 30 people.<sup>92</sup> Friction in the POC site is mostly linked to overcrowding and tensions between the Shilluk and the Nuer.<sup>93</sup>

While the security situation in Upper Nile is stabilizing, it remains vulnerable.<sup>94</sup> Vulnerability has been increased by climate-induced shocks, which have contributed to high levels of food insecurity and displacement from flood-affected areas since 2020.<sup>95</sup> Unprecedented rains along the Nile swept away crops, drowned livestock, eroded live-

<sup>89</sup> Craze, J., *The Periphery Cannot Hold: Upper Nile since the Signing of the R-ARCSS* (Small Arms Survey: Geneva, Nov. 2022).

<sup>90</sup> UN Mission in South Sudan and Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (note 86), p. 32.

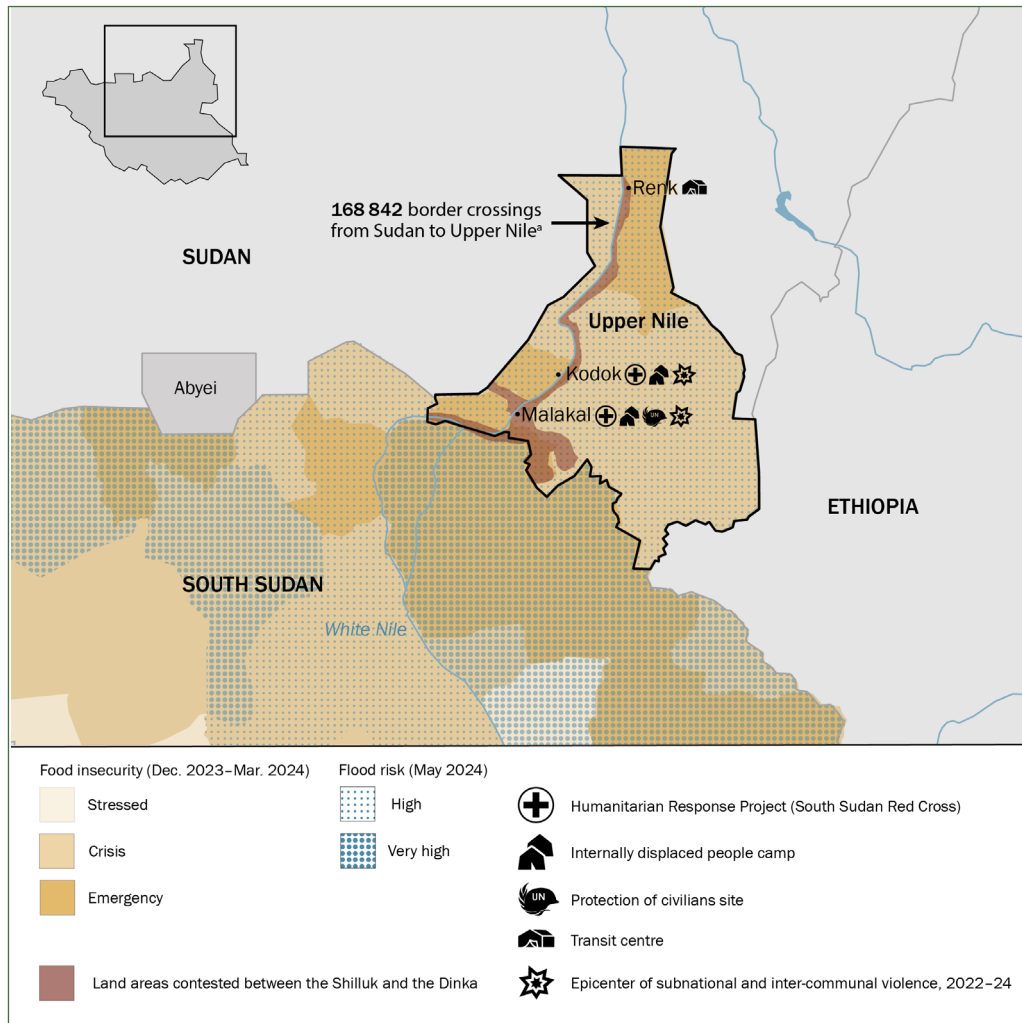
<sup>91</sup> UN Mission in South Sudan and Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (note 86), p. 32.

<sup>92</sup> Nonviolent Peaceforce (note 85).

<sup>93</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM) South Sudan, ‘IOM responds to humanitarian needs after fighting erupts in Malakal PoC site’, Feb. 2016.

<sup>94</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Upper Nile State, South Sudan: Area-based Durable Solutions Roadmap—Solutions Strategy for Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (2024–2026)* (UNHCR: Juba, Feb. 2024); Interview nos 21 and 22; Focus group nos 1, 2 and 3; and Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (note 64).

<sup>95</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP), *2020 FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to the Republic of South Sudan*, Special report (FAO: Rome, 13 May 2021).



**Figure 3.1.** Food insecurity, flood risk, conflict and displacement in Upper Nile state, 2024

<sup>a</sup> Between 1 January and 29 May 2024, 194 635 individuals have crossed the border, among which 168 842 crossed the border into Upper Nile state itself.

Sources: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), ‘South Sudan: IPC acute food insecurity and malnutrition analysis, September 2023–July 2024’, 6 Nov. 2023; UN Satellite Centre, ‘Flood monitoring over South Sudan’, accessed May 2024; Craze, J., *The Periphery Cannot Hold: Upper Nile since the Signing of the R-ARCSS* (Small Arms Survey: Geneva, Nov. 2022); and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM), ‘Population movement from Sudan to South Sudan’, IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, accessed 22 Feb. 2024.

livelihoods and health, and contributed to population movements.<sup>96</sup> In 2023 some areas around Kodok remained submerged for months.<sup>97</sup> Climate impacts have also altered the migration routes of cattle, forcing pastoralists into agricultural areas for grazing. This has contributed to clashes between communities.<sup>98</sup> Relatedly, livestock loss has triggered cycles of cattle raiding to replenish lost herds.<sup>99</sup>

The overlapping challenges in Upper Nile are complex (see figure 3.1). Their different social, economic and environmental impacts have contributed to erosion of the resilience of the population in Upper Nile. When income and food are sparse, people

<sup>96</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (note 4); and International Crisis Group (note 84).

<sup>97</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC), Integrated Community Resilience Project, Phase II Quarter 1, Narrative report, 2023 (unpublished).

<sup>98</sup> Yaw Tchier, A. E. et al., ‘South Sudan’, Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet, NUPI and SIPRI, Mar. 2022; and Interview no. 3.

<sup>99</sup> Yaw Tchier et al. (note 98).



depend on humanitarian assistance and rely on negative coping mechanisms, including marrying off their children or being susceptible for recruitment by armed groups or armed forces.<sup>100</sup> There is thus an urgent need to address the drivers of crisis. How the SSRC is doing so is examined next.

### **Addressing humanitarian needs and crisis drivers: The South Sudan Red Cross**

Founded in 2011, the SSRC's vision is a 'Healthy and resilient population of the most vulnerable affected by conflict, crises, and climate change'.<sup>101</sup> Fostering social cohesion is part of its mission.<sup>102</sup> The SSRC seeks to 'prevent and alleviate human suffering', provides 'humanitarian aid to civil and military victims' and extends 'community services to the general population of South Sudan'.<sup>103</sup> It operates as an 'auxiliary' to public authorities in humanitarian affairs.<sup>104</sup> This entails 'mutual responsibilities and benefits, based on international and national laws'.<sup>105</sup> Public authorities and the SSRC agree on areas in which the latter 'supplements or substitutes public humanitarian services'.<sup>106</sup> In addition to the fundamental principles, the SSRC's work is guided by four core values: localization, community engagement and accountability, integrity, and diversity.<sup>107</sup>

As of 2022 the SSRC relied on a network of 17 467 registered volunteers (10 355 male and 7112 female).<sup>108</sup> Registered volunteers can include professionals (e.g. doctors, paramedics and nurses) based in different localities or community-based volunteers trained in first aid and other tasks by their SSRC branch to implement specific projects. They are to be distinguished from locals who volunteer their time to participate in resilience-building activities organized by the SSRC. This paper focuses on registered, community-based volunteers (referred to as 'programme volunteers') trained by the SSRC's Malakal branch to implement the Humanitarian Response Project. After completion of mandatory courses, all registered, active HR Project volunteers obtain SSRC identification cards and other visibility material to carry out SSRC project activities.<sup>109</sup>

The HR Project, examined in the next chapter, is the SSRC's biggest project in Upper Nile responding, among other things, to added pressures on host communities related to returnees and refugees.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>100</sup> International Rescue Committee (IRC), 'South Sudan: Hunger, conflict and climate crisis', 10 Apr. 2023; UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), 'Increased food insecurity in South Sudan exacerbates threats to the lives of 3.1 million children in urgent need of protection', July 2023; and Focus group nos 4 and 6.

<sup>101</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (note 16), p. v.

<sup>102</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (note 16), p. v.

<sup>103</sup> South Sudan Red Cross Society Act, South Sudanese Act no. 42, signed into law 9 Mar. 2012, Article 3.

<sup>104</sup> South Sudan Red Cross Society Act (note 103), Article 7.

<sup>105</sup> IFRC, *Guide to the Auxiliary Role of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies: Africa*, 2nd edn (IFRC: Geneva, 2021), p. 8.

<sup>106</sup> IFRC (note 105), p. 8.

<sup>107</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (note 16).

<sup>108</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (note 16).

<sup>109</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC), 'Volunteering policy', 2023 (unpublished).

<sup>110</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (note 94).

## 4. The Humanitarian Response Project in Upper Nile

The South Sudan Red Cross's HR Project in Upper Nile may be contributing to preventing conflict and enhancing the prospects for peace. However, any such contributions are currently unintentional and they are not measured. This chapter thus analyses how those contributions could be made intentional.

The chapter first describes the HR Project's objectives and main components. Then, based on the evidence collected in the field, it develops four theories of change through which the SSRC could purposefully promote peace and build social cohesion. For each TOC, it lays out the conditions for the desired impacts to materialize; assesses how realistic or challenging these are; and examines how to measure them. In this way, TOCs offer a means to understand the processes and conditions needed for positive change.<sup>111</sup> Recommendations related to each TOC are summarized in chapter 5.

### Project objectives and components

The HR Project started in 2021 as the Integrated Community Resilience Project; it is planned to run until 2026.<sup>112</sup> Its implementation by the SSRC is supported by the Swedish Red Cross as part of a 15 million kronor (US\$1.4 million) project funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).<sup>113</sup>

The project seeks to address severe humanitarian needs and enhance the ability of communities to withstand climate and conflict-related shocks. A key focus is enhanced community resilience, understood as 'The ability of communities—and their members—exposed to disasters, crises and underlying vulnerabilities, to anticipate, prepare for, reduce the impact of, cope with and recover from the effects of shocks and stressors without compromising their long-term prospects'.<sup>114</sup> The project targets the most vulnerable members of the host community, returnees, IDPs and refugees in Malakal, Kodok and Renk.<sup>115</sup> Expansion to more locations is funding-dependent.<sup>116</sup>

The HR Project has four components: disaster risk reduction and livelihoods; emergency WASH; health; and protection (see box 4.1).<sup>117</sup> Each component targeted 16 000–20 200 people in 2023/24, with the largest component being protection (see table 4.1).<sup>118</sup> While the project's food security element is limited, the integration of the four components has the potential to make households more food secure.

The project is implemented by registered, community-based, ethnically diverse female and male volunteers trained by the Malakal branch of the SSRC and community leaders who help identify vulnerabilities and target groups.<sup>119</sup> It seeks to generate ownership through the creation and strengthening of community-led structures, knowledge and skills that outlive the project and secure health, safety and livelihoods

<sup>111</sup> Woodrow, P. and Oatley, N., 'Practical approaches to theories of change in conflict, security and justice programmes', Part I, 'What they are, different types, how to develop and use them', British Department for International Development and CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, Mar. 2013; Delgado et al. (note 32), pp. 15–16; and Delgado, C., *The World Food Programme's Contribution to Improving the Prospects for Peace in El Salvador* (SIPRI: Stockholm, 2019), p. 9.

<sup>112</sup> Swedish Red Cross, Internal presentation, Nov. 2023 (unpublished).

<sup>113</sup> Swedish Red Cross (note 112).

<sup>114</sup> IFRC (note 15), p. 5. See also Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Humanitarian aid application, South Sudan (top up 2023), 2023 (unpublished).

<sup>115</sup> Interview no. 12.

<sup>116</sup> Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (note 114); and Interview no. 12.

<sup>117</sup> Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (note 114); and Interview nos 8 and 14.

<sup>118</sup> Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (note 114).

<sup>119</sup> Interview no. 14; and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (note 114).

**Box 4.1. Components of the South Sudan Red Cross's Humanitarian Response Project****Disaster risk reduction and livelihoods**

This component seeks to reduce negative coping mechanisms and to protect livelihoods through the distribution of essential household items, unconditional cash transfers and awareness raising around the risks associated with climate change.<sup>a</sup> The idea is for communities to take 'active roles in preparedness, responding and mitigating' climate-related risks in order to minimize negative impacts on livelihood.<sup>b</sup> Activities involve fruit tree planting, kitchen gardening, and the distribution of seeds, fishing nets and tools for digging water channels.<sup>c</sup>

**Emergency water, sanitation and hygiene**

The water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) component includes provision of a drinking water treatment plant and latrines and promotion of hygiene measures.

**Health**

The health component consists of health screenings, referrals of malnutrition cases to relevant project partners and training of volunteers through the Boma Health Initiative (BHI). The BHI is designed to standardize 'community health services, strengthen linkages between communities and primary health facilities, and improve community ownership and governance of health services'.<sup>d</sup> It seeks to 'harmonize the delivery of fragmented community health services which are currently supported by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with funding from different donors'. The overall aim is to prevent diseases related to the lack of sanitation, recurrent flooding and displacement.

**Protection**

The protection component addresses sexual and gender-based violence, child abuse, and mental health. It does this through psycho-social support, mobile child-friendly spaces for recreational activities, the provision of dignity kits (for menstrual hygiene), raising awareness of economic and physical violence, referral for external case management, and capacity-building training on sexual and gender-based violence (for religious leaders, police, army, public authorities and teachers).<sup>e</sup> Jointly with the International Committee of the Red Cross, the South Sudan Red Cross also contributes to restoring families divided by violence and conflict in Renk, Maban, Malakal and Kodok.<sup>f</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Humanitarian aid application, South Sudan (top up 2023), 2023 (unpublished).

<sup>b</sup> Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (note a); and Interview no. 14.

<sup>c</sup> Interview nos 8 and 14.

<sup>d</sup> Management Sciences for Health (MSH), 'The Boma Health Initiative', Apr. 2019.

<sup>e</sup> Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (note a).

<sup>f</sup> Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (note a).

once it ends.<sup>120</sup> Cognizant of the history and risk of renewed conflict in Upper Nile, the HR Project emphasizes inclusion and social cohesion among and between communities by assisting both host communities and IDPs and different ethnic groups.<sup>121</sup>

**Towards intentional peace promotion: Theories of change**

The HR Project is not a peacebuilding project. While its focus on coping with the effects of shocks and stressors and the conditions in Upper Nile would allow it to take on conflict issues, the project mandate has thus far not been interpreted in this way. Yet, the HR Project has the potential to intentionally promote peace by reinterpreting the mandate to include conflict prevention and if its programmes were to form part of an integrated, comprehensive crisis response that connected humanitarian, development and peacebuilding stakeholders both vertically and horizontally.

<sup>120</sup> Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (note 114).

<sup>121</sup> Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (note 114); and Interview no. 14.

**Table 4.1.** Targets for the South Sudan Red Cross's Humanitarian Response Project, April 2023–March 2024

Targeted output	No. of people targeted
Disaster risk reduction and livelihoods	16 040
WASH	16 000
Health	16 100
Protection	20 200

WASH = Water, sanitation and hygiene.

Source: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Humanitarian aid application, South Sudan (top up 2023), 2023 (unpublished).

This section develops four TOCs as a tool to identify how the SSRC could realize the HR Project's potential to promote peace in Upper Nile. TOCs provide clarity not only on what positive change is sought in a specific context, but also on underlying assumptions or conditions for success. Developing TOCs goes hand in hand with devising indicators to test whether they deliver the desired results, assess how realistic the underlying assumptions are and examine the extent to which the conditions for success could be achieved. If the expected results are reached, a TOC offers 'a causal pathway that can be explored, assessed for validity and adapted for other contexts'.<sup>122</sup>

The first TOC relates to the food-production and income-generating potential of the multisectoral HR Project. The other three TOCs concern implementation and operational processes of the SSRC. Given that the people of South Sudan remain 'socially and politically disparate, divided by geography, ethnicity and localised subsistence economies and kin-based loyalties', particular attention is paid to how the work of the SSRC may facilitate contact between individuals, families and communities to rebuild social cohesion and how bottom-up interventions connect to top-down efforts.<sup>123</sup> All four TOCs are connected, building upon each other, and they become gradually more ambitious as they move from a focus on internal project design to a focus on influencing external factors that affect the state of conflict in Upper Nile. The TOCs should thus not be taken in isolation if the SSRC wants to intentionally promote peace through the HR Project.

### **Multisectoral programming: Strengthening food security, incomes, emergency WASH and protection to promote peace**

Around 95 per cent of people in South Sudan depend on agricultural activities (crop farming, pastoralism and fishing) for food and income.<sup>124</sup> In Upper Nile, households are predominantly pastoral, but they also rely on small parcels of land that are rain-fed and hand-cultivated.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, subsistence fishery is common.<sup>126</sup> Women and children collect and sell firewood when income is sparse.<sup>127</sup> Conflict, climate pressures and diseases limit income-generation opportunities. This contributes to families not having enough money to keep their children in school—a place where children from different communities and ethnicities come together.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>122</sup> de Coning, C., 'Adaptive peacebuilding', *International Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 2 (Mar. 2018); and Delgado (note 32).

<sup>123</sup> Bradbury, M. et al., *Local Peace Processes in Sudan: A Baseline Study* (Rift Valley Institute: Nairobi, 2006), p. 36, quoted in Liaga and Wielenga (note 13), p. 396.

<sup>124</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), 'FAO emergencies and resilience: South Sudan', [n.d.].

<sup>125</sup> Harrop (note 75).

<sup>126</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (note 63).

<sup>127</sup> Focus group nos 4 and 6.

<sup>128</sup> Focus group no. 4; and Interview nos 16 and 19.

South Sudan has a youth bulge: almost 63 per cent of the population is below 25 years of age.<sup>129</sup> While there is no direct association between youth and violence or crime, when combined with adverse social and economic conditions (e.g. limited livelihood and educational opportunities, poor shelter and overall living conditions, the presence of armed groups as well as domestic violence), youth in Upper Nile are at risk of contributing to violence, crime and instability.<sup>130</sup>

The pervasive domestic and gender-based violence is driven by spousal age difference, low education levels, poverty and alcohol consumption.<sup>131</sup> Child marriage particularly affects girls.<sup>132</sup> Boys in Upper Nile run a greater risk of resorting to cattle ‘raids, thefts and robberies, especially against neighbouring communities’.<sup>133</sup>

The presence of criminal gangs in Upper Nile limits fishing activities as gangs steal fish and canoes from fishing communities.<sup>134</sup> Fear of being attacked also prevents late-night fishing or fishing in areas further away.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, subsistence farming has shifted to kitchen gardening because women were afraid to go far to tend their plots.<sup>136</sup> Both public officials and humanitarian stakeholders confirm that farmers do not farm if their plots are far away and they do not feel safe.<sup>137</sup> Humanitarian staff argue that youth would be less inclined to engage in cattle raiding or criminal activities if they stayed in school or had other opportunities.<sup>138</sup>

Key entry points for promoting peace in Upper Nile thus include improving livelihoods through income-generating activities for households that allow children to stay in school and reduce the incidence of child marriage and reduce tensions at home and in the community.<sup>139</sup> While cultural barriers challenge efforts to combat illegal child marriage, addressing financial scarcity—a driver of this practice—could mitigate its occurrence. The underlying assumption is that greater economic stability contributes to both food security, violence prevention and peace at both household and community levels in fragile contexts, in part as it allows families to keep their children in school. The first TOC therefore focuses on reliable income generation and keeping children in school to foster more peaceful family and community relations.

*Theory of change 1. Preventing school dropouts through enhanced income, food security, WASH and health to avert violence and nurture peaceful coexistence*

*If* cash benefits, fishing nets, seeds, trees, and greater WASH and protection awareness enhance household income,  
*and if* enhanced income contributes to families keeping their children in school,  
*then* these contributions are likely to decrease early marriage and youth criminal activities  
*thereby* preventing violence that undermines peaceful family and community relations.

<sup>129</sup> Harrop (note 75).

<sup>130</sup> Harrop (note 75); United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, A/HRC/43/56, 31 Jan. 2020; Focus group no. 1; and Interview no. 20.

<sup>131</sup> What Works Consortium (note 75); and Harrop (note 75), p. 53.

<sup>132</sup> Harrop (note 75), p. 54.

<sup>133</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), *South Sudan: The Impact of Conflict on Food Security and Livelihoods*, Data in Emergencies Information System (DIEM) Impact Report (FAO: Rome, Jan. 2024), p. 39.

<sup>134</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (note 133).

<sup>135</sup> Focus group no. 4; and Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (note 133).

<sup>136</sup> Focus group nos 1, 2 and 4.

<sup>137</sup> Interview nos 20 and 22.

<sup>138</sup> Interview nos 8, 18 and 27.

<sup>139</sup> Interview no. 16.

*Evidence and analysis.* Interviewees saw school dropout and youth unemployment as key drivers of conflict in Upper Nile.<sup>140</sup> Aid recipients highlighted their difficulties in paying school registration fees at the outset of the school year.<sup>141</sup> Youth in the POC site were regarded as particularly vulnerable.<sup>142</sup> One focus group participant mentioned that joblessness contributed to alcoholism and fighting among youth.<sup>143</sup>

Post-distribution monitoring of 324 households that received aid conducted in October 2023 in Malakal and Kodok suggested that 60 per cent of households preferred in-kind distributions and vouchers to cash.<sup>144</sup> Only 35 per cent preferred unconditional cash given the decision autonomy it transfers to recipients.<sup>145</sup> Despite the large preference for in-kind aid, aid providers argued for cash transfers to circumvent difficult logistical issues and the potential for in-kind aid to deplete local markets.<sup>146</sup> The amount was coordinated with other humanitarian actors to avoid competition and conflict.<sup>147</sup> The distribution of fishing nets was appreciated by aid recipients, although one focus group participant said that not enough families received them.<sup>148</sup> Similarly, the provision of seeds and the planting of fruit trees were seen as important contributions, although it was too early for any impact assessment.<sup>149</sup> Volunteers, aid recipients and community leaders agreed that awareness-raising activities were most successful in WASH practices and showed positive health outcomes.<sup>150</sup> Protection, gender and inclusion awareness-raising were seen as much more difficult given cultural sensitivities around child marriage, rape and gender-based violence.<sup>151</sup>

The HR Project currently does not measure the income-generation effects of the cash transfers, distribution of fishing nets and seeds, and fruit tree planting, nor does it track the school attendance or marriage of aid recipients' children. Thus, no evidence could be collected on such potential impacts and linkages. Three additional limitations for longer-term income-generation effects can be highlighted: limited cash funds, the seasonal nature of fishing and the risk of crop destruction.

First, cash transfers were a one-off \$100 benefit.<sup>152</sup> Internal assessments showed that over 69 per cent of the money is used for immediate basic needs, including food and healthcare, rather than income generation.<sup>153</sup> Aid recipients argued that the cash lasted for a only few days, particularly as households average 8–12 individuals and many families in Malakal and Kodok were opening their homes to returnees from Sudan.<sup>154</sup> The timing of cash distributions depended on the intensity of the crisis and available funds.<sup>155</sup> According to the humanitarian mandate, it was meant for the most vulnerable households to alleviate immediate suffering. It was neither timed to coincide with the start of the school year, when registration fees are due, nor did it target households with numerous school-age children to support peace-promoting goals connected to keeping children in school.

<sup>140</sup> Interview no. 14; Focus group no. 6; and Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (note 133).

<sup>141</sup> Focus group no. 4.

<sup>142</sup> Focus group no. 6.

<sup>143</sup> Focus group no. 6.

<sup>144</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC), 'Post-distribution monitoring (PDM) findings (cash transfers Malakal and Kodok September 2023)', Oct. 2023 (unpublished).

<sup>145</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (note 144); and Focus group nos 2, 3 and 6.

<sup>146</sup> Interview nos 8, 11 and 23.

<sup>147</sup> Interview nos 8 and 20.

<sup>148</sup> Focus group no. 2.

<sup>149</sup> Focus group nos 1 and 4.

<sup>150</sup> Focus group nos 1 and 3.

<sup>151</sup> Focus group nos 3 and 5; and Interview nos 10 and 16.

<sup>152</sup> Interview no. 8.

<sup>153</sup> Interview no. 8; and South Sudan Red Cross (note 144).

<sup>154</sup> Focus group no. 4; and South Sudan Red Cross (note 144).

<sup>155</sup> Interview no. 8.



Second, fishing is seasonal and the lifespan of fishing nets is limited.<sup>156</sup> Unless fishers generate enough additional income to be able to repair their nets and buy new ones after they are worn out, the impact of such aid is limited. Aid recipients were not surveyed on the frequency of their fishing activities, volume caught or the number of customers to assess potential income-generation effects.

Third, aid recipients and Red Cross staff highlighted that the destruction of crops by insects and birds was a problem.<sup>157</sup> Fruit tree planting had started and was ongoing, with the first mango harvest expected after two years. Hence, no harvests or food security impacts could yet be tracked. Red Cross staff also mentioned that not all people were ready to plant or care for fruit trees—fear of renewed insecurity and the potential need to leave prevented them from focusing on long-term agricultural income-generating investments.<sup>158</sup> Others highlighted that the strengthening of agricultural activities was prevented by land conflicts along ethnicities in Malakal involving returnees, POC site residents and other displaced people as well as outstanding land-allocation issues.<sup>159</sup> Accessing land, even if it is available, also remains an issue given persistent security concerns. More generally, income, land and other assets are distributed unequally in South Sudan, making needs-based distribution of seeds or trees difficult.

*Conditions for success and measurement.* At least four conditions must hold for the peace-promoting impacts of this TOC to materialize.

First, to increase the likelihood of peace effects related to enhanced income generation, all of the HR Project's current aid forms would need to be integrated into a package that goes to the same households in the same area and be designed to strengthen socio-economic resilience to avoid aid dependency. Given that aid recipient targeting is strictly based on needs, such integrated packages would not necessarily be possible and would stretch a strict interpretation of the SSRC's mandate.<sup>160</sup> However, such an approach would be consistent with the shift—championed by the IFRC—towards socio-economic empowerment to strengthen resilience. Bringing together community engagement and accountability, cash and voucher assistance, social protection, food security, and livelihoods, this approach focuses on community-driven 'employment, self-employment and entrepreneurial development', as well as 'local economic production and market linkages'.<sup>161</sup> Similarly, two humanitarian actors suggested that aid targeting should not always be based on what people cannot do (buy water, food or medicine), but should focus on what they can do (plant, fish, run a small business, etc.).<sup>162</sup> This involves difficult trade-offs related to targeting and project design.

In addition, one Red Cross employee wondered whether conditional rather than unconditional aid is appropriate in certain circumstances, for example, to incentivize school attendance.<sup>163</sup> Others suggested that closer coordination, alignment and deeper partnerships with development and peacebuilding actors to achieve fuller integrated aid packages with longer-term, sustainable outcomes are necessary (see Theory of change 4 below).<sup>164</sup> This may be difficult if donors' limited funding streams focus on immediate responses, rather than longer-term interventions.

Second, peace-promoting effects are more likely to materialize if the distribution of seeds and fruit tree seedlings are complemented with activities that contribute

<sup>156</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (note 63).

<sup>157</sup> Focus group nos 3 and 4; and Interview no. 14.

<sup>158</sup> Interview nos 10 and 23.

<sup>159</sup> Interview no. 20; and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (note 94).

<sup>160</sup> Interview no. 8.

<sup>161</sup> IFRC, *Global Plan 2024* (IFRC: Geneva, 2023), p. 42.

<sup>162</sup> Interview nos 10 and 20.

<sup>163</sup> Interview no. 10.

<sup>164</sup> Interview nos 3 and 24; and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (note 94).

to successful harvesting and enhanced agricultural production. This may include measures to ensure climate-resilient produce, pest and flood protection, more effective land use, productivity gains, nature-based solutions and the resolution of land issues to ensure ownership and maintenance of plots.<sup>165</sup> Incentivizing group farming, planting, construction or maintenance activities are other measures to enhance agricultural production while at the same time offering an opportunity to focus people on common goals.<sup>166</sup> Such merging of community skills for longer-term objectives has been successful elsewhere.<sup>167</sup> Resolving land issues, whereby IDPs and returnees with land titles can reclaim individual plots via government processes, is a priority for both public and humanitarian, development and peacebuilding stakeholders in Upper Nile and prevents conflict related to further displacement.<sup>168</sup>

Third, not only must aid recipients have the money to pay school registration fees for their children, but they must also prioritize leaving both girls and boys in school, a place where different communities and ethnicities mix and children learn to work together and bridge differences.<sup>169</sup> A key barrier to leaving girls in school is that, in most communities across South Sudan, girls are married in exchange for dowries paid to their families in cattle or cash. Bride prices in pastoral communities are lower for girls who stay in school for longer because they are older and because of perceptions of a higher risk to their honour connected with school attendance.<sup>170</sup>

Changing such perceptions and traditional practices is difficult and takes time.<sup>171</sup> However, there were openings for cultural change among the households that received regular visits by the SSRC's registered, community-based volunteers in Malakal and Kodok. In addition, both female and male aid recipients argued for preventing early marriage and early pregnancy and for keeping girls in school.<sup>172</sup> Male focus group participants mentioned that acceptance of girls in school was increasing given the work of the humanitarians.<sup>173</sup> One interviewee suggested that community size has an impact on the success of gender transformation and protection work—their work in this area was more successful in larger communities than in small, traditional ones.<sup>174</sup>

Fourth, if the lack of schools and teachers, the overcrowding of schools, the absence of vocational training programmes and joblessness translate into violence at home and in the community, the SSRC can only prevent such conflict if it connects its humanitarian aid with other stakeholders working on these structural barriers. Examples include expanding its work on menstrual hygiene and access to water in schools in Upper Nile; partnerships with actors who focus on enhancing school infrastructure; or advocacy attempts with public authorities to communicate need for restoring schools or creating vocational training programmes in Upper Nile (see Theory of change 4).<sup>175</sup> This would ensure traditional humanitarian aid is embedded in a broader crisis-response model, giving it greater chances of being effective and contributing to peace.

These four conditions invite rethinking around integrating aid modalities and engaging not only communities but also other humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and public actors in a broader response model for long-term impact and reduced aid

<sup>165</sup> Interview nos 2 and 20.

<sup>166</sup> Interview nos 2, 3 and 20.

<sup>167</sup> IFRC, *A Red Cross Unit in Every Community: Developing a Countrywide Community Volunteer Network in Burundi Red Cross Society*, Case study (IFRC: Geneva, 2012).

<sup>168</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (note 94), p. 3.

<sup>169</sup> Interview nos 16, 19, 24 and 26.

<sup>170</sup> Harrop (note 75), p. 55.

<sup>171</sup> Interview no. 10.

<sup>172</sup> Focus group no. 4.

<sup>173</sup> Focus group no. 2.

<sup>174</sup> Interview no. 9.

<sup>175</sup> Focus group nos 1, 2, 3 and 6.



dependency. This does not require revising mandates, but instead considering trade-offs and making peace promotion an intentional part of the HR Project.

Currently, the SSRC does not measure the income-generating effects of aid nor aid recipients' decisions related to their children's school enrolment and attendance or marriage. Existing surveys could, however, track such effects and decisions as part of post-distribution monitoring. In addition to surveying what the cash transfers are used for, people who received fishing nets could be asked whether or not they catch enough fish to sell, how many customers they have, and whether these are gained through markets or other means. Furthermore, questions could be added that relate to what difference this made to relations within their household and community and why. Similar questions could be asked related to agricultural produce resulting from seed and fruit tree distribution. If planting takes place around the houses that volunteers visit, survey results could be compared against yield observations reported by programme volunteers.

Questions related to school enrolment and attendance can be added to baseline and endline assessments to track changes over time, before and after the cash transfers. Ideally, assessments should also take place throughout the various phases of the project. To obtain gender-disaggregated data, the questions can differentiate between boys and girls. In addition to observing the number of school-aged children who enrol at, remain enrolled at and regularly attend school, questions could be added on the reasons why (or why not) and what impact this had on their household and community.

### **Theories of change related to the implementation and operational processes of the South Sudan Red Cross**

A key threat to social cohesion in South Sudan is 'the breakdown of intergroup relations and the absence of tangible peace dividends, underpinned by the fear of violence and low levels of constructive civic engagement'.<sup>176</sup>

The SSRC relies on its registered, community-based volunteers to implement the HR Project. Programme volunteers in Malakal and Kodok did not gain financially from the project (although the SSRC's volunteering policy allows for reimbursement of pre-approved expenses related to a volunteering activity). By training unpaid local programme volunteers from the affected communities, the SSRC hopes to empower communities to help themselves, thereby avoiding aid dependency.<sup>177</sup> The SSRC's programme volunteers share a commitment to prevent and reduce vulnerability in society, with the values of compassion and inclusivity at the core of their efforts. The aim is to build a dedicated network of skilful volunteers who not only respond to the needs of communities but also encourage the capacity for self-help, thereby contributing to peace and resilience.<sup>178</sup>

At the time of the research, the SSRC's Malakal branch had 1567 registered, community-based volunteers (873 male and 694 female), of which approximately 1000 were active.<sup>179</sup> The majority were youth volunteers in their twenties.<sup>180</sup> Despite the higher number of trained male volunteers, female volunteers attended training more regularly. Staff suggested that women were likely to have more free time while men were more likely to be at school or to pursue income-generating activities.<sup>181</sup> Other studies sug-

<sup>176</sup> Louise, C. et al., *Understanding Social Cohesion and Peace Capacities*, SCORE South Sudan Policy Report (Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development: Nicosia, Oct. 2020), p. 7.

<sup>177</sup> Interview nos 9 and 14.

<sup>178</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (note 109).

<sup>179</sup> Interview no. 19.

<sup>180</sup> Interview nos 1, 14 and 19.

<sup>181</sup> Interview no. 14.

gest that women (including in South Sudan) may see such training as an opportunity to challenge gender norms related to volunteering, allowing them to engage and take ownership.<sup>182</sup>

The SSRC's programme volunteers are of different genders, ethnicities and religious beliefs and exemplify helpfulness, teamwork and constructive civic engagement through their service-delivery activities, which can cut across community divisions and ethnic lines. Theories of change 2 and 3 therefore relate to the potential social cohesion and peace-promoting impacts of the SSRC's HR Project volunteers.

*Theory of change 2. Increasing acceptance of diversity by strengthening the network of community-based programme volunteers*

*If* the SSRC's registered, community-based programme volunteers of different genders, ethnicities and religious backgrounds adopt the SSRC's fundamental principles of humanity, impartiality and service without financial gain,  
*and if* they consistently model helpfulness and non-discrimination in their communities through their HR Project activities,  
*then* adoption of these principles should increase solidarity, acceptance of diversity and equality among both programme volunteers and aid recipients,  
*thereby* contributing to social cohesion.

*Evidence and analysis.* The Malakal branch formally trains female and male volunteers from different ethnic groups together in the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, the provision of first aid, and psycho-social support and awareness (e.g. on gender-based violence, sanitation, hygiene, health and nutrition).<sup>183</sup> The training underlines the values of equality, unity and non-discrimination.<sup>184</sup> Together with subsequent HR Project activities, it exposes and integrates programme volunteers into the organizational culture of the SSRC, whose staff are also from different ethnic backgrounds.<sup>185</sup> Sometimes programme volunteers from the Malakal branch support other Red Cross branches.<sup>186</sup>

SSRC programme volunteers regularly referred to the fundamental principles of humanity and impartiality. Their motivation to volunteer included 'helping people regardless of their tribal identity', 'serving a community', 'working together and forging new friendships', as well as 'learning'.<sup>187</sup> Displaced Red Crescent volunteers from Sudan were integrated into the SSRC.<sup>188</sup> So were programme volunteers from the POC site.<sup>189</sup> Staff suggested that the ties formed between programme volunteers ensured that they were welcome in communities of fellow trained volunteers different from their own.<sup>190</sup> At the same time, the locations of humanitarian assistance and programme volunteers were carefully matched around ethnicity and language, given the conflict sensitivity and safety concerns.<sup>191</sup>

<sup>182</sup> Cadesky, J., Baillie Smith, M. and Thomas, N., 'The gendered experiences of local volunteers in conflicts and emergencies', *Gender & Development*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2019).

<sup>183</sup> Interview no. 12.

<sup>184</sup> Interview nos 14 and 19.

<sup>185</sup> Interview nos 1, 6 and 12.

<sup>186</sup> Interview no. 12.

<sup>187</sup> ICRC (note 8); and Focus group nos 1 and 5. Also Interview no. 1.

<sup>188</sup> Interview no. 14.

<sup>189</sup> Interview no. 25.

<sup>190</sup> Interview no. 14.

<sup>191</sup> Interview nos 4, 12, 14 and 25.

Aid recipients and community leaders appreciated the awareness-raising work of SSRC programme volunteers in their house-to-house or school visits.<sup>192</sup> Programme volunteers' helpfulness and presence in the life of the communities were also visible through first aid provision at soccer matches, their help in constructing water channels to stem flooding or in running a temporary portable water-sanitation facility.<sup>193</sup> Focus group participants and humanitarian actors further recognized the valuable role that programme volunteers played in identifying the most vulnerable people within their communities.<sup>194</sup> Overall, SSRC programme volunteers had a dual role as service providers and community builders.<sup>195</sup>

Several strengths and weaknesses related to enhancing social cohesion through a network of programme volunteers stood out. Regarding the strengths, trained community-based volunteers enjoyed acceptance and trust given that they were from the communities themselves, often spoke multiple languages, shared valuable knowledge and skills with everyone alike, secured help for the most vulnerable, and focused community efforts on the provision of common goods that benefit all.<sup>196</sup> This included programme volunteers who lived in the POC site.<sup>197</sup> Their community proximity also allowed them to contribute to developing community-led solutions by reporting back on vulnerabilities and needs.<sup>198</sup>

Aid recipients and community leaders perceived programme volunteers' efforts as reliable because they heard the same consistent messages from different volunteers and SSRC staff. These messages ranged from the importance of keeping children (including girls) in school; via preventing violence (including sexual- and gender-based violence) in the home, school and the community; to improving nutrition, food preparation and sanitation and hygiene practices to prevent illness.

Moreover, contrary to findings of an organizational capacity assessment that the fundamental principles were not necessarily well understood, there was evidence that the SSRC Malakal branch staff and programme volunteers identified with the fundamental principles and took pride in belonging to the Red Cross 'family'.<sup>199</sup> This showed itself, among other things, in wearing Red Cross vests, the status that came with it, their desire to spend time together in the Malakal branch grounds, and the positioning of a banner with the fundamental principals at the branch.<sup>200</sup>

As to the weaknesses, interviewees highlighted that volunteers' economic hardship prevented retention. There was no shortage of volunteer applicants, although, in some areas, their level of education was low.<sup>201</sup>

Crucially, other ways of delivering aid challenged the long-term expectation that mobilizing communities through voluntary, unpaid activities implemented by programme volunteers would help stem aid dependency by enabling people to work towards common goods, strengthen solidarity and develop a sense of responsibility towards each other.<sup>202</sup> If, for example, other aid organizations in the same area offered food or cash for work, this led to demands by community members for remuneration

<sup>192</sup> Focus group nos 2, 3 and 4.

<sup>193</sup> Interview no. 22; and Focus group nos 2, 3 and 4.

<sup>194</sup> Focus group no. 2; and Interview no. 20.

<sup>195</sup> Baillie Smith, M. et al., 'Uneven geographies of youth volunteering in Uganda: Multi-scalar discourses and practices', *Geoforum*, vol. 134 (Aug. 2022).

<sup>196</sup> Focus group nos 1 and 2.

<sup>197</sup> Interview no. 25.

<sup>198</sup> IFRC (note 15), p. 90.

<sup>199</sup> IFRC, South Sudan Red Cross organizational capacity assessment and certification (OCAC) findings report, Aug. 2022 (unpublished); and Interview no. 10.

<sup>200</sup> Interview nos 4 and 14.

<sup>201</sup> Interview nos 12 and 27.

<sup>202</sup> Interview no. 12.

or reluctance to engage in community activities implemented by SSRC programme volunteers.<sup>203</sup>

Staff, public officials and other humanitarian, development and peacebuilding stakeholders highlighted that aid dependency in Upper Nile was a real challenge and lamented the lack of willingness among aid recipients to ‘do the work themselves’.<sup>204</sup> The extent to which aid dependency can be avoided through mobilizing community participation around common goods merits further investigation beyond the scope of this paper. A 2012 case study on the efforts of the Burundi Red Cross Society to establish a countrywide community volunteer network to deliver sustainable services based on local, rather than international, resources is an important contribution in this regard.<sup>205</sup>

*Conditions for success and measurement.* For the social cohesion effects of this TOC to materialize, several conditions must hold.

First, programme volunteers from different areas and ethnicities need to be retained and remain active for a long enough period to forge bonds with fellow volunteers, provide services together regularly, and perform their SSRC activities across different communities or dividing factors while ensuring conflict sensitivity. This requires strategic management of the retention of HR Project volunteers and the frequency, type and location of their activity through the branch volunteer-management system. As a consequence of underemployment and the youth bulge in South Sudan, there is no shortage of volunteers in Malakal and Kodok.<sup>206</sup> Indeed, one volunteer in Kodok suggested that there were too many to engage regularly.<sup>207</sup> Red Cross staff attempted to mitigate this by putting volunteers on a rotation system.<sup>208</sup>

Second, the activities that programme volunteers undertake need to allow them to showcase their acceptance of diversity and equality by calling attention to the fundamental principles and the non-discriminatory provision of aid.<sup>209</sup> This requires a purposeful design of service delivery and activities across communities and dividing factors, for example involving IDPs, returnees, refugees and host communities while ensuring conflict sensitivity and ‘doing no harm’. To do so, the SSRC considers diversity in the recruitment of programme volunteers (and staff), project design and needs assessments.

Third, for social cohesion effects to materialize, community leaders and aid recipients would not only need to take notice of the values of humanity, helpfulness and non-discrimination across different community lines but also accept their worth and apply them. Focus group participants said that the humanitarian actors played a role in bringing people together, enhancing understanding of what living together means, showing itself in the fact that in Malakal ‘now everyone mixes at the market’.<sup>210</sup>

The social cohesion effects could be measured not only through observation of programme volunteers and their interactions, but also through surveys. Surveys of programme volunteers could include questions related to how they apply the fundamental principles, the extent to which their HR Project activities allowed them to forge friendships with fellow volunteers from different communities and whether their volunteering has contributed to building relations in other communities.

<sup>203</sup> Interview nos 1 and 12.

<sup>204</sup> Interview nos 9, 10, 12 and 24.

<sup>205</sup> IFRC (note 167).

<sup>206</sup> Interview no. 12.

<sup>207</sup> Focus group no. 5.

<sup>208</sup> Interview no. 19.

<sup>209</sup> South Sudan Red Cross Society Act (note 103).

<sup>210</sup> Focus group no. 2.

Current surveys of SSRC aid recipients could be adapted to include questions that measure community attitudes toward diversity and equality and capture their interactions across ethnic divisions as well as their participation in the provision of common goods such as the maintenance of water channels or latrines.<sup>211</sup> In line with current practice, surveys need to be conducted both before and after becoming a recipient in order to detect change. Alternatively, and more resource-intensively, the same questions could be put to aid recipients and non-recipients to see whether greater exposure to the volunteers makes a difference in terms of acceptance of diversity and equality or in terms of helping to provide common goods.

*Theory of change 3. Broadening social cohesion effects within and between communities by developing networks of change agents*

*If* former programme volunteers of different ethnic and religious backgrounds become change agents or leaders in their communities,  
*and if* they thus promote ‘mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples’ after leaving their role at the SSRC,  
*then* the transformative impact related to the fundamental principles goes beyond individual projects,  
*thereby* enhancing acceptance of diversity and equality, and hence social cohesion, in and between communities more broadly.<sup>212</sup>

*Evidence and analysis.* In Malakal and Kodok, programme volunteers’ motivation to learn is connected to, among other things, hopes of building a career base. One female programme volunteer dreamed of becoming a doctor despite having recently dropped out of school due to her family’s financial constraints.<sup>213</sup> Others advocated for vocational training, including the training of midwives and teachers.<sup>214</sup> SSRC staff argued that the best retention strategy was to offer training and a learning path to volunteers that give them status in their communities.<sup>215</sup> Some volunteers ended up working for humanitarian actors in the area, others for the SSRC. Some rose within the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, including the SSRC’s secretary-general, who started as a volunteer.<sup>216</sup> Staff as well as other humanitarians highlighted the importance of professional skill-building and vocational training as part of the SSRC’s programming and operations.<sup>217</sup>

Regardless of whether programme volunteers take paid positions inside or outside the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, they tend to stay in their communities, be selected for their ability to influence community members and become change agents committed to solidarity, equality, cooperation and peace.<sup>218</sup>

A purposeful focus on the development and professional progression of programme volunteers has a clear strength, particularly considering the large number and the long waiting list of volunteers in Malakal. It could ensure that programme volunteers, upon leaving their HR Project volunteer role, transition from HR Project implementers and community builders to change agents in their communities who are involved in decision-making and problem-solving for longer-term, broader transformative impacts

<sup>211</sup> Interview no. 12.

<sup>212</sup> ICRC (note 8).

<sup>213</sup> Focus group no. 1.

<sup>214</sup> Focus group nos 2, 3 and 6.

<sup>215</sup> Interview no. 1.

<sup>216</sup> Interview nos 12, 14 and 27.

<sup>217</sup> Interview nos 17, 20 and 27.

<sup>218</sup> Interview nos 1, 10 and 12.

beyond project cycles.<sup>219</sup> As such, programme volunteers could purposefully train to become leaders who spread the Red Cross and Red Crescent values beyond fellow volunteers and HR Project aid recipients.

SSRC staff suggested that the work done by programme volunteers after their training sparked new ideas.<sup>220</sup> The fact that salaried SSRC staff sometimes become unpaid volunteers when a project ends or that people continue to visit the branch in their free time after securing a paid job is evidence of lasting commitment and loyalty.<sup>221</sup>

A challenge is that, once they find paid employment, most programme volunteers leave.<sup>222</sup> SSRC staff saw the departure of programme volunteers as a success given their contribution to the volunteers' career prospects.<sup>223</sup> At the same time, interviewees highlighted the problem of retaining talent.<sup>224</sup> Another challenge was the high illiteracy rate. While there was hope that volunteers would get into vocational programmes through development of their soft skills, the ability to generate project proposals that could effectively communicate community demands was questioned by one interviewee.<sup>225</sup>

*Conditions for success and measurement.* Three conditions are key for broader social cohesion effects to materialize.

First, volunteers need to be intentionally prepared for work outside the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement in order to create community change agents who uphold the movement's values even after their programme volunteer roles end. Currently, this may or may not be happening accidentally. Such an intention is in line with IFRC resilience frameworks that ask national societies to 'promote leadership capacity in communities', 'train and nurture volunteers and members of the community to be strong problem-solvers' and recognize 'the potential of volunteers as agents of change within their communities'.<sup>226</sup> The IFRC's resilience frameworks were, however, not yet well known within the SSRC. Moreover, Swedish Red Cross staff disagreed on whether national societies, including the SSRC, should get involved in the professional development of programme volunteers.

Second, the SSRC would need to actively build networks of former programme volunteers and to facilitate connections between current and former volunteers and participation in professional programmes. Such network-building requires more than setting up and maintaining a programme volunteer database. A recent organizational capacity assessment showed that the SSRC's volunteer databases were too rudimentary to support strategic and operational processes.<sup>227</sup> While some Red Cross staff welcomed possibilities of 'stronger connectedness' between current and former programme volunteers and of former programme volunteers 'remaining catalysers of the humanitarian principles', others questioned the feasibility of building such networks, particularly in the Global South.<sup>228</sup>

Third, depending on the type of training that volunteers would require, the SSRC would need to refer or connect them to other organizations and professional pro-

<sup>219</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (note 109); Interview no. 4; and Lucard, M., 'The backbone and the brains', *Red Cross Red Crescent*, no. 1, 2018.

<sup>220</sup> Interview no. 14.

<sup>221</sup> Interview no. 14.

<sup>222</sup> Interview no. 14.

<sup>223</sup> Interview nos 12 and 14.

<sup>224</sup> Interview nos 19 and 27.

<sup>225</sup> Interview no. 9.

<sup>226</sup> IFRC (note 15), pp. 14, 36; and IFRC, *IFRC Framework for Community Resilience* (IFRC: Geneva, 2014), p. 13.

<sup>227</sup> IFRC (note 199).

<sup>228</sup> Workshop participants, 13 Mar. 2024.



grammes (e.g. medical training facilities or universities).<sup>229</sup> This might have cost implications, and resources for volunteer development are limited.<sup>230</sup> If the motivation of volunteering focuses too much on career progression, it also raises the question of whether the solidarity between volunteers could be affected.

Measurement would need to include tracking, monitoring and nurturing volunteers' development and professional path in a way similar to organizational employee or alumni networks that are fostered for broader social, economic and political connections and impacts. Both the IFRC and the ICRC have alumni networks open to former employees whatever their function or location, to 'keep in touch', 'share expertise' and 'live their values and help each other'.<sup>231</sup> Building such a network will probably require additional technical assistance. To measure peace-promoting impact, surveys would need to be carried out in communities with a large presence of former volunteers and in communities with few or no former volunteers to detect any difference in terms of greater acceptance of diversity, equality, solidarity and focus on common goods.

### **Theory of change on broader longer-term SSRC engagement in conflict and peacebuilding settings**

Peace and conflict are complex phenomena with diverse manifestations. Adding to the complexity is their subjective nature, often described in ways that are detached from the experiences of affected societies.<sup>232</sup> Portrayals of organized violence in South Sudan commonly oversimplify and generalize the intricate dynamics of the conflict.<sup>233</sup> For example, there is a tendency to narrow down organized violence to inter-communal clashes, primarily marked by cattle raiding and ethnic divisions driven by armed youth.<sup>234</sup> Such reductionist perspectives fail to capture the multifaceted nature of the conflict and lived experiences. Understanding and engaging with these complexities is crucial to contributing effectively to the prospects of sustainable peace.<sup>235</sup>

Aid agencies typically distinguish between Peacebuilding with a 'big P' and peacebuilding with a 'small p' in complex humanitarian settings like Upper Nile. Peacebuilding (with a big P) prioritizes political or security responses to violent conflicts, often mandated by the United Nations Security Council, such as UNMISS. They are notable for their scale, visibility and substantial resources, including foreign military and civilian personnel.<sup>236</sup> In contrast, peacebuilding (with a small p) often focuses on local community efforts, such as dialogue and reconciliation, aiming to empower communities and transform relationships. While such an agency-oriented transformative approach is long-term, humanitarian action can also promote peace through specific project activities.<sup>237</sup> For example, community members in Malakal and Kodok pointed to cultural events organized or supported by the SSRC that brought people from different ethnicities together, a prerequisite for building peace, as well as peacebuilding workshops targeting youth.<sup>238</sup>

<sup>229</sup> Interview no. 27.

<sup>230</sup> Interview no. 1.

<sup>231</sup> IFRC, 'Alumni association', [n.d.]; and ICRC, 'ICRC alumni', [n.d.].

<sup>232</sup> Firchow (note 38); and Mac Ginty, R., 'Indicators+: A proposal for everyday peace indicators', *Evaluation and Program Planning*, vol. 36 (Feb. 2013).

<sup>233</sup> Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRFF) South Sudan and World Food Programme (WFP), 'Adjusting terminology for organised violence in South Sudan', Sep. 2020.

<sup>234</sup> Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility South Sudan and World Food Programme (note 233).

<sup>235</sup> Firchow (note 38).

<sup>236</sup> Firchow (note 38); and UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (note 36).

<sup>237</sup> Interview no. 9.

<sup>238</sup> Focus group nos 1, 3 and 4.

Peacebuilding must happen at all levels. Just as peace at the national level does not necessarily constitute peace at the subnational level, successful community-level peacebuilding or social cohesion initiatives do not necessarily lead to peace or social cohesion at the national level.<sup>239</sup> Only a combination of top-down and bottom-up efforts can build sustainable peace. This demands greater coherence and coordination up and down the chain of relationships that link international, national and local actors.<sup>240</sup> Even if an organization, such as the SSRC, mainly focuses on small-p peacebuilding initiatives, a community always depends on or interacts with other actors, such as local authorities.<sup>241</sup>

The SSRC is well placed to support such vertical integration because of its strong community anchoring combined with its role as an auxiliary to public authorities while adhering to international humanitarian principles. The IFRC emphasizes vertical integration ‘to achieve resilience’ requiring ‘many stakeholders from different levels, sectors and disciplines [to] work together’.<sup>242</sup> It recognizes that national societies, such as the SSRC, ‘play a role in building social capital *inside* a community’, but can also ‘focus on connecting better with entities, people and resources *outside* the community’ to ‘convene, bridge, unite, introduce and link’.<sup>243</sup> The last TOC therefore goes beyond a focus on the HR Project, underscoring the crucial need to connect initiatives across all levels to ensure broader and longer-term dimensions of humanitarian action that promotes peace and prevents conflict. It is the most ambitious and potentially most contentious of the four TOCs.

*Theory of change 4. Vertical integration between top-down and bottom-up peacebuilding*

*If* the SSRC draws upon its extensive engagement with conflict-affected communities and its role auxiliary to public authorities,  
*and if* it uses its communication and collaboration channels to foster vertical integration between grassroots peacebuilding initiatives and broader national and international efforts,  
*then* this will contribute to more integrated, inclusive and effective approaches to building and sustaining peace.

*Evidence and analysis.* UNMISS registered a reduction in conflict-related violence between 2022 and 2023 in Upper Nile.<sup>244</sup> Many interviewees perceived improved security dynamics, yet diverse experiences and narratives surrounding peace and conflict were evident, with the Malakal POC site emerging as a distinctive microcosm embodying nuanced lived experiences of both conflict and peace.<sup>245</sup> Although POC site residents noted security improvements, some expressed particular concern about the recent influx of youth fleeing violence in Sudan.<sup>246</sup> The noticeable cultural differences brought by youth included children as young as 14 carrying arms with the intention

<sup>239</sup> Autesserre, S., ‘International peacebuilding and local success: Assumptions and effectiveness’, *International Studies Review*, vol. 19, no. 1 (Mar. 2017).

<sup>240</sup> Donais, T., ‘Towards vertically integrated peace building: Bridging top-down and bottom-up approaches’, Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), 2013.

<sup>241</sup> Interview no. 2.

<sup>242</sup> IFRC (note 15), p. 14.

<sup>243</sup> IFRC (note 15), p. 14 (emphasis in original).

<sup>244</sup> UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), Human Rights Division, ‘Brief on violence affecting civilians’, Oct.–Dec. 2022; and UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), Human Rights Division, ‘Brief on violence affecting civilians’, July–Sep. 2023.

<sup>245</sup> Focus group nos 1, 2 and 6.

<sup>246</sup> Focus group no. 6.



to harm fellow residents.<sup>247</sup> Similarly, a representative of a humanitarian organization operating in the POC site attributed tensions partly to the different perspectives brought by refugees and returnees from Sudan.<sup>248</sup>

Such perception of Sudanese refugees (or South Sudanese returnees) differed starkly from community members in Kodok, another destination for people fleeing Sudan. There, the prevailing sentiment was one of embracing the refugees and returnees as ‘extended family’, a cultural imperative that transcended the community’s existing hardships.<sup>249</sup> As one community member reflected, ‘in Kodok, we consider we have an extended family; this means that you welcome those who suffer from conflict and violence, and you share what you have with them, whether you have food or not’.<sup>250</sup>

The children growing up in the POC site presented a different lived experience of peace and conflict from their peers in Malakal. A humanitarian aid worker explained that many of the youth who arrived at a young age, often orphaned, have only known life in the camp—with harsh conditions, limited space to play, and little or no access to education.<sup>251</sup> This environment fosters a mindset focused on revenge against those responsible for their displacement, perpetuating a destructive cycle of revenge killings.<sup>252</sup>

Residents of Malakal town recognized the distinct security conditions within the POC site, likening it to a ‘prison’ where power dynamics govern everyone’s lives.<sup>253</sup> The existence of power hierarchies in the POC site contrasted sharply with the freedom of movement enjoyed by people in Malakal.<sup>254</sup>

As the preceding TOCs suggest, growing food insecurity can be a catalyst for heightened tensions and violence. The narratives surrounding conflicts between farmers and herders reveal that access to limited natural resources, including land and water, is imbued with deeper complexities.<sup>255</sup> Given that cattle herding is a dominant livelihood activity in Upper Nile, it frequently leads to community conflict over access to land and water.<sup>256</sup> However, farmer–herder conflicts are not merely an access dispute; they can also serve as a symbolic manifestation of power dynamics between communities.<sup>257</sup> Sometimes communities perceiving themselves as disadvantaged use herding practices as a tool to assert dominance against more powerful counterparts. One interviewee stated, ‘many people told me that if there is room for conflict today, they will target some communities to strip them of their power, so they become equal’, underscoring the strategic use of conflicts to redress food insecurity and perceived power imbalances.<sup>258</sup>

The SSRC has identified cattle raiding as a physical and food security concern in the communities where it operates, and it has sought to analyse the debates governing raiding and has explored avenues for changing attitudes.<sup>259</sup> The importance of involving youth to stem raiding efforts was stressed in this context.<sup>260</sup>

<sup>247</sup> Focus group no. 6.

<sup>248</sup> Interview no. 18.

<sup>249</sup> Focus group no. 3.

<sup>250</sup> Focus group no. 3.

<sup>251</sup> Interview no. 18.

<sup>252</sup> Interview no. 18.

<sup>253</sup> Focus group no. 2.

<sup>254</sup> Focus group no. 2.

<sup>255</sup> Interview no 18.

<sup>256</sup> Kuot, L. M., ‘Farmers–herders’ conflict undermines peace building efforts in South Sudan’, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Jan. 2024).

<sup>257</sup> Interview no. 10.

<sup>258</sup> Interview no. 10.

<sup>259</sup> Interview no. 27.

<sup>260</sup> Interview no. 27.

When adopting a people-centred approach emphasizing the agency of the affected population, it is imperative to delve into the multifaceted narratives that underlie conflict-affected societies.<sup>261</sup> This approach is foundational to the Humanitarian Response Project, which, through community engagement and accountability, integrates the population's own experiences and coping mechanisms.

The SSRC's Food Security and Resilience Plan constitutes a further possibility for capturing narratives and for contributing to other national-level peacebuilding activities.<sup>262</sup> The plan aligns with the South Sudanese government's Vision 2040 and the revised national development strategy.<sup>263</sup> While Vision 2040 sets out the longer-term vision for South Sudan, aspiring for peace, the revised national development strategy acts as a key instrument for implementing the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan.<sup>264</sup> Through its alignment to these policies, the Food Security and Resilience Plan aims to consolidate peace by supporting conflict-affected communities in rebuilding their livelihoods and becoming more resilient to shocks.<sup>265</sup>

Given that the demands of local communities are currently disconnected from high-level political dynamics, vertical integration is imperative. This disconnect is partly attributable to a deficiency in effective channels that bridge the gap between the needs of the conflict-affected populations and the echelons of political decision-making.<sup>266</sup> Public officials in Juba and Malakal recognized this disconnect and argued for the design of government programmes to better integrate the realities of conflict affecting people's everyday life.<sup>267</sup> Various humanitarian agencies concurred, with one noting that Malakal's new governor was trying to foster community dialogue.<sup>268</sup>

To inform peacebuilding initiatives at different levels, the SSRC—and, indeed, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement as a whole—is well positioned to channel the diversity of narratives and lived experiences of conflict and peace and related needs collected by its volunteers and through its deep engagement with community leaders. Operating nationwide with branches across South Sudan, the SSRC could facilitate the exchange of narratives and analytical perspectives from different subnational conflict settings.<sup>269</sup> The SSRC already prioritizes moving from an approach of 'informing' humanitarian diplomacy to an 'influencing' approach in order to fulfil the role of being the 'voice of the most vulnerable groups'.<sup>270</sup> Without compromising its neutrality and impartiality, such efforts focus on formal and informal decision makers and opinion leaders to ensure that they 'act in the interest of the most vulnerable people of South Sudan'.<sup>271</sup>

As an auxiliary to public authorities, the SSRC has regular contact with public officials and can therefore act as a bridge between public authorities and communities.<sup>272</sup> Its staff attend government meetings, and public authorities sit on the SSRC board. In

<sup>261</sup> For further insights on the Red Cross's people-centred approach see Red Cross EU Office, *People-centRED Approach: Strengthening Local-to-global Capacities* (Red Cross EU Office: Brussels, Feb. 2023); IFRC (note 15); and Interview no. 6.

<sup>262</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC), 'Food security and resilience country plan' (unpublished).

<sup>263</sup> South Sudanese Government, *Revised National Development Strategy 2021–2024: Consolidated Peace and Stabilize the Economy* (South Sudanese Government: Juba, 2021).

<sup>264</sup> Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (note 3).

<sup>265</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (note 262).

<sup>266</sup> Interview no. 9.

<sup>267</sup> Interview nos 22 and 24.

<sup>268</sup> Interview nos 18, 20 and 22.

<sup>269</sup> Interview no. 27.

<sup>270</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (note 16), p. 34.

<sup>271</sup> South Sudan Red Cross (note 16), p. 35.

<sup>272</sup> Interview no. 12; and IFRC (note 15).

Malakal the SSRC holds monthly meetings with local authorities and community leaders to evaluate and identify key challenges.<sup>273</sup> These regular interactions provide the SSRC with avenues to inform peacebuilding efforts by public authorities while keeping within its mandate and adhering to humanitarian principles.

Other ways to act as a bridge between communities and public authorities include keeping communities informed about their rights and responsibilities and about decisions by public authorities; facilitating access to local public authorities; and ensuring community representation in local and national decision-making settings. The SSRC's auxiliary role can also translate into advocacy to public authorities to enhance some projects or advocate for changes in policies.<sup>274</sup> Examples related to Theory of change 1 include advocacy around restoring Malakal's school infrastructure, hiring qualified teachers, implementing laws that prohibit child marriage in Malakal, or solving land and ownership issues.

The SSRC can explore numerous potential other coordination platforms available for vertical and horizontal integration efforts. Examples include the state-level Task Force on Solutions for Upper Nile, which coordinates durable solutions for displacement between humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and government actors. It is co-led by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission of South Sudan's Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).<sup>275</sup> The UNHCR also convenes area-based coordination meetings between Upper Nile's state government and interested humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors operating in Malakal. Coordination efforts led by UNMISS include the Upper Nile Coordination Forum and the Malakal POC Transition Task Force. The former works on better addressing security and humanitarian challenges. The latter works on transitioning the last Malakal POC site into an IDP camp with the support of humanitarian actors and facilitated by public authorities. Final examples of platforms that the SSRC can explore for vertical and horizontal integration include the inter-cluster coordination group chaired by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and such coordination platforms as the Technical Land Committee and the Task Force on Returnees.

In this context, humanitarian agencies noted the consistent presence and accuracy of information on the humanitarian needs and situation provided by SSRC programme volunteers.<sup>276</sup> Programme volunteers also offer valuable contacts that can enhance the overall effectiveness of collaborative efforts.

Area-based coordination meetings are a new opportunity to enhance vertical integration. The initiative brings together humanitarian and development agencies with UNMISS to coordinate with public authorities, including the Ministry of Peacebuilding. The Durable Solutions Roadmap for Upper Nile—which was devised by the Upper Nile state government and several humanitarian, development and peacebuilding stakeholders—identifies as critical the expansion of peace and community-cohesion activities and the strengthening of community-based and government-led conflict-prevention projects.<sup>277</sup> It also shows that the Upper Nile state government and humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors recognize the urgent need for reduced aid dependency. This can only be achieved by connecting and building on each other's

<sup>273</sup> Interview no. 14.

<sup>274</sup> IFRC (note 15), p. 64.

<sup>275</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (note 94), p. 11.

<sup>276</sup> Interview no. 20.

<sup>277</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (note 94).

activities and working towards common goals. The fact that the SSRC is not yet engaged in this collaboration is a missed opportunity.<sup>278</sup>

*Conditions for success and measurement.* The SSRC's success in fostering vertical integration hinges on three crucial conditions, two involving internal change-management processes and the third involving horizontal collaborations with other humanitarian actors.

First, the SSRC must clearly define its conceptualization of peace, its level of ambition in terms of contributing to peace and its channels of implementation. This is currently not the case in SSRC documentation.

The level of ambition refers to situating its engagement on a spectrum ranging from applying the 'do no harm' principle at one end to intentionally enhancing prospects for peace at the other. Starting from the minimum ('do no harm'), as the level of ambition increases the SSRC could move to be intentionally peace-responsive (i.e. responding to opportunities to promote peace identified, e.g., through conflict analysis) or peace-promoting (i.e. actively building opportunities for peace, possibly where there are none).<sup>279</sup> The level of ambition may vary between different interventions and over time and place. Hence, it needs to be defined and monitored accordingly. Such clarity is equally indispensable for measuring impacts. The more ambitious the level of peace promotion, the more varied additional monitoring is required. Defining peace, the level of ambition to promote it and the channels of implementation could play a pivotal role in fostering a shared vision of the SSRC, which would address a deficiency underscored in a recent organizational assessment.<sup>280</sup>

Defining peace and ambition prompts a deeper reflection on the humanitarian and fundamental principles. While these principles ensure access and build trust amid war, a peacebuilding expert underscored the need to carefully weigh the trade-offs between delivering humanitarian aid and strengthening the agency of affected populations.<sup>281</sup> This kind of nuanced consideration of, or degree of alignment with, humanitarian principles (see chapter 2) is important for navigating the dynamic nature of conflict and the complexities of contributing to peace within the humanitarian framework.

Second, the SSRC must conduct solid conflict analysis to ensure a conflict-sensitive approach in its engagements. A solid conflict analysis identifies the drivers of conflict and its causes (root, structural and proximate) as well as potential conflict triggers in each location.<sup>282</sup> A prerequisite for conflict-sensitive programming, it identifies opportunities for promoting peace and social cohesion. Conflict analysis needs to be process-oriented, programme relevant and updated regularly to reflect shifting conflict and peace dynamics.<sup>283</sup> A constantly updated and relevant conflict analysis can support the SSRC in adjusting its activities and programmes according to contextual changes.

The SSRC currently pursues conflict sensitivity through monitoring economic and security-related shifts and risks at the national and branch levels. This is done, among other ways, through engagement with community leaders and elders as well as the monitoring of media sources. Findings are reported in two main documents: weekly updates and monthly activity reports. The weekly updates highlight the main political, economic and social issues at the national, regional and state levels. They contain insights on security incidents and subnational violence in order to inform the implementation of activities and risk management at the national and state levels.

<sup>278</sup> Interview no. 21.

<sup>279</sup> Brusset, E. et al., *Measuring Peace Impact: Challenges and Solutions* (SIPRI: Stockholm, Nov. 2022).

<sup>280</sup> IFRC (note 199).

<sup>281</sup> Interview no. 9.

<sup>282</sup> Delgado et al. (note 32).

<sup>283</sup> Delgado et al. (note 32).

Each branch also compiles monthly activity reports shared with Juba headquarters.<sup>284</sup> Although they refer to the security situation and potential impacts on branch activities, the SSRC seems to lack a formalized framework for conducting structured context and conflict analyses that unpack the nuanced lived experiences of peace and conflict. To enhance its peace-promoting impact, the SSRC should consider incorporating structured context and conflict analyses that explore the intricacies of peace and conflict experiences within communities.

Third, connecting actors at different levels through vertical integration also needs horizontal alignment among humanitarians, between humanitarian and development actors, and between humanitarian and peacebuilding actors. While vertical integration seeks to bridge top-down and bottom-up peacebuilding, horizontal integration focuses on improving the effectiveness and strategic coordination among a narrower set of international actors engaged in peacebuilding.<sup>285</sup> Under the IFRC community resilience road map, ‘No National Society can support all the priorities that communities identify during a context analysis or vulnerability and capacity assessment’.<sup>286</sup> This is why national societies, such as the SSRC, should seek to connect to other organizations to ensure a holistic approach to addressing the needs of conflict-affected populations.<sup>287</sup> UN officials working on vertical and horizontal integration, as well as public officials, emphasize that many organizations are doing similar activities, and there is a need for greater communication and alignment between humanitarians and across the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus.<sup>288</sup> Currently, the lack of horizontal integration risks duplications, parallel structures and unhealthy competition among humanitarian actors over decreasing resources for increased needs.<sup>289</sup>

To measure vertical and horizontal integration, the SSRC’s monthly activity reports could track advocacy efforts within the different channels available to the SSRC to engage with humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors and public authorities on needs and demands of communities in Upper Nile, priorities for humanitarian action that prevents conflict, and long-term sustainable impacts that promote peace and social cohesion. Measuring outcomes of such efforts, in turn, requires using existing reporting tools or developing new ones that examine long-term overall strategic results and how project-design processes are changing in order to ensure that peace-promotion is not only a goal, but done intentionally. Five-yearly strategic plan assessments would be a tool to do so.

Conflict analysis is part of such an effort. So is mapping of the actors working on the conditions that make the peace-promotion potential of SSRC projects more likely. This would form the basis to generate alignment and partnerships across the nexus and targeted advocacy efforts (more schools and teachers, implementation of existing laws, solving access to and ownership of land, moving from emergency WASH to sustainable drinking water provision and health services, etc.).

Deepening existing partnerships, collaborations or contacts with other actors in the peacebuilding field that rely on unpaid volunteers—for example, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), War Child, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and World Vision—is crucial to promoting sustainable peace without compromising humanitarian principles. Such partnerships and collaboration could also be an avenue to pool resources or identify new sources of funding.

<sup>284</sup> Interview nos 13 and 27; and Focus group no. 4.

<sup>285</sup> Donais, T. and Burt, G., ‘Peacebuilding in Haiti: The case for vertical integration’, *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>286</sup> IFRC (note 15), p. 64.

<sup>287</sup> Interview no. 2.

<sup>288</sup> Interview nos 20, 21, 22 and 24.

<sup>289</sup> Interview no. 9.



## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

This paper underscores the importance and appropriateness of humanitarian action in promoting peace in conflict-affected areas. Having examined the complexities involved in integrating peacebuilding into humanitarian efforts in Upper Nile state in South Sudan, it shows that the South Sudan Red Cross is well-placed to contribute to enhancing the prospects for peace through principled humanitarian action that prevents conflicts. Long-term peaceful coexistence, social cohesion and grassroots-level change are part of its strategic goals. In addition, as the voice of the most vulnerable, it can channel different lived experiences of conflict and peace and related needs to formal and informal decision makers and opinion leaders without compromising its neutrality and impartiality, thereby informing peacebuilding initiatives at different levels.

Nonetheless, any contribution to peace is currently a positive side effect, rather than an intentional pursuit. To intentionally enhance the prospects for peace through the SSRC's multisectoral programming focused on livelihoods, water, sanitation and hygiene, health, and protection in Upper Nile, four theories of change can support the SSRC's mandate and the achievement of the fundamental principles in this context. Building upon each other, they become gradually more ambitious, addressing both internal and external constraints to become intentionally peace-promoting.

Theory of change 1 suggests that conflict-sensitive integrated aid packages that provide cash transfers, fishing nets, seeds, tree seedlings, WASH, health and protection services can empower households economically. They thereby reduce the need for harmful coping mechanisms such as dropping out of school, early marriage and youth criminal activities.

Theory of change 2 suggests that programme volunteers can promote social cohesion if their activities are systematically managed and purposefully designed to increase the acceptance of diversity and solidarity among fellow programme volunteers, staff and aid recipients. Programme volunteers from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Upper Nile exemplify helpfulness, teamwork and constructive civic engagement, which can contribute to healing community divisions and peaceful coexistence.

Theory of change 3 hypothesizes that social cohesion effects related to volunteering can be broadened should the SSRC decide to transform Humanitarian Response Project volunteers into leaders involved in community decision-making and problem-solving with transformative impact beyond project cycles.

Theory of change 4 suggests that both vertical integration between top-down and bottom-up peacebuilding efforts and horizontal integration among humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors would strengthen peace promotion. Vertical and horizontal integration is crucial to ensuring a holistic approach to addressing the needs of conflict-affected populations, avoiding duplication of efforts, and striving for sustainable impacts and contributions to prevent conflict and promote peace in Upper Nile. The analysis identifies at least seven potential channels to achieve vertical and horizontal integration.

The following recommendations related to each TOC are the key to fostering conditions that make peace and the social cohesion impacts of the HR Project more likely and maximize the impact of humanitarian aid.

### **Generating income and preventing school dropouts**

1. The SSRC should consider creating integrated aid packages alongside one-off emergency distributions for more holistic, longer-term interventions.

2. The SSRC should strengthen activities that ensure the sustainability of agricultural interventions and make successful harvests more likely. This could include enhanced focus on climate-resilient produce, pest and flood protection, productivity gains, land ownership, and nature-based solutions. Incentivizing group farming would be another way to strengthen agricultural production and contribute to peacebuilding efforts.
3. The SSRC should integrate an explicit focus on leaving children in school into the HR Project. Partnerships across the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus could be formed with other initiatives in Malakal and Kodok (e.g. around school feeding programmes, the provision of school supplies, access to water and improved menstrual hygiene management). The SSRC could create a safer environment for students and address protection risks by training community members, partnering or working with actors at the local, national and international actors to improve schools. Existing or future collaborations in Upper Nile with the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF, World Vision or SNV Netherlands Development Organisation come to mind in this context.
4. The SSRC should measure the impact of integrated aid packages through baseline and monitoring surveys and observation. Perception surveys should track income-generating effects of aid, school enrolment and attendance of girls and boys, and decisions related to child marriage. Aid recipients should be asked about the frequency of their fishing activities, volume caught and harvested, the number of their customers and the difference this makes to their household and community relations. Similarly, aid recipients should be asked at the outset of, during and at the end of the HR Project about how many sons and daughters they have enrolled in school; the frequency with which they attend school and why; whether or not marriage played any role in school attendance; and what difference this made to household and community relations.
5. The SSRC’s advocacy efforts involving public authorities should address overcrowded schools, the availability of teachers, access to WASH and land, as well as other humanitarian needs and inequities in Upper Nile.

### **Increasing acceptance of diversity**

1. HR Project volunteering activities should intentionally showcase diversity and non-discrimination while ensuring conflict sensitivity and the safety of programme volunteers.
2. The SSRC should focus on retaining programme volunteers from diverse backgrounds for long enough to allow them to forge bonds while providing services across communities. This could involve, but not be limited to, non-monetary incentives such as recognition in their communities, skill development and acknowledgement that they are contributing to peacebuilding.
3. The SSRC should measure the social cohesion effects of programme volunteering through observation and surveys of programme volunteers and aid recipients, and it should track changes in community attitudes and behaviour over time.



### **Broadening social cohesion effects**

1. The SSRC should consider preparing HR Project volunteers for leadership roles in their communities. This would allow them to promote mutual understanding among all peoples beyond a project cycle and their time as volunteers and beyond their peer group and aid recipients. The SSRC should recognize and support the aspirations of programme volunteers for development, should enhance vocational training and should connect the volunteers to other skill-building programmes.
2. The SSRC should consider building a volunteer network, akin to employee or alumni associations, that connects current and former programme volunteers. In the context of South Sudan, the SSRC could use its preferred communications and institutional channels to keep programme volunteers connected, allow for knowledge exchanges, and inform them about developments, professional opportunities and achievements. Depending on available resources, the SSRC could host community meetings, training sessions and workshops to foster networking opportunities and skill-sharing between current and former programme volunteers. The alumni networks of the IFRC and the ICRC might provide inspiration on how to achieve this.
3. The SSRC should track and monitor volunteers' development and professional paths and should assess broader social, economic and political impacts through survey work in communities with volunteers and without volunteers. This may require additional technical assistance.
4. The SSRC must ensure that working intentionally on social cohesion does no harm. Adherence to the fundamental principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence is crucial to avoid turning current and former programme volunteers into targets of violence. To ensure the safety of its programme volunteers, the SSRC should conduct rigorous and ongoing conflict analysis. Moreover, the SSRC should continue to build on local structures, capacities and other organizations that promote social cohesion and dialogue between communities.

### **Vertical and horizontal integration**

1. The SSRC needs to define its understanding of peace and the level of its ambition in contributing to peace. To allow for effective monitoring and impact assessment, it should clearly distinguish between minimum 'do no harm' interventions and intentional peace-promoting activities.
2. SSRC staff should engage more deeply with the IFRC's community resilience road map, with a particular focus on its social cohesion dimension. The SSRC could adapt existing tools to assess community resilience at the national and branch levels to ensure that social cohesion is measured. It should strengthen the human resources and the time allocated to data collection and analysis.
3. The SSRC should enhance its conflict-analysis capabilities not only to ensure a conflict-sensitive approach, but also to deepen its understanding of the nuanced experiences of peace and conflict within communities. Such analyses should be informed by diverse perspectives and updated to reflect shifting dynamics.

4. The SSRC should leverage its engagement with conflict-affected communities and its role auxiliary to public authorities in order to connect peacebuilding initiatives across different levels. This would foster vertical integration between grassroots peacebuilding initiatives and broader national and international efforts.
5. To foster horizontal integration, the SSRC should map the actors working on conditions conducive to sustainable peace. This mapping should form the basis for generating alignment and partnerships across different sectors and targeted advocacy efforts aimed at addressing issues related to education, implementation of laws, land access, and sustainable provision of such basic services as drinking water and health.
6. The SSRC could use its monthly activity reports to measure vertical and horizontal integration in order to track advocacy efforts and engagement with humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors and public authorities. These efforts should focus on addressing community needs in Upper Nile, prioritizing humanitarian action that prevents conflict, and promoting long-term sustainable impacts for peace and social cohesion. Additionally, the use of existing or new reporting tools that examine long-term strategic results and ensure intentional peace-promotion in project design processes is required. Five-yearly strategic plan assessments could serve as a tool for this purpose.

## Appendix A. List of interviews and focus groups

Interviews and focus groups took place between 12 January and 9 February 2024. The interviews in Stockholm were held online; all other interviews were conducted in person in South Sudan.

Interview	Date	Location	Interviewees	No. of interviewees
1	12 Jan.	Stockholm	RC/RC movement	1
2	19 Jan.	Stockholm	RC/RC movement	1
3	19 Jan.	Stockholm	RC/RC movement	1
4	19 Jan.	Stockholm	Expert	1
5	23 Jan.	Stockholm	RC/RC movement	1
6	26 Jan.	Stockholm	RC/RC movement	1
7	30 Jan.	Juba	Swedish Embassy	3
8	30 Jan.	Juba	RC/RC movement	1
9	30 Jan.	Juba	Nonviolent Peaceforce	1
10	30 Jan.	Juba	RC/RC movement	1
11	30 Jan.	Juba	IOM	1
12	1 Feb.	Malakal	RC/RC movement	1
13	1 Feb.	Malakal	RC/RC movement	1
14	1 Feb.	Malakal	RC/RC movement	1
15	2 Feb.	Kodok	RRC	1
16	3 Feb.	Malakal	War Child	1
17	3 Feb.	Malakal	IMC	1
18	5 Feb.	Malakal	UNICEF	1
19	5 Feb.	Malakal	RC/RC movement	1
20	5 Feb.	Malakal	OCHA	1
21	5 Feb.	Malakal	UNHCR	1
22	6 Feb.	Malakal	Public authorities (agriculture)	1
23	8 Feb.	Juba	RC/RC movement	2
24	8 Feb.	Juba	Public authorities (humanitarian affairs)	1
25	8 Feb.	Juba	RC/RC movement	1
26	8 Feb.	Juba	RC/RC movement	1
27	9 Feb.	Juba	RC/RC movement	1
<b>Total (27 interviews)</b>			<b>30</b> <b>(16 RC/RC staff,</b> <b>7 other humanitarian</b> <b>stakeholders,</b> <b>6 public authorities,</b> <b>1 independent expert)</b>	<b>30</b> <b>(23 men, 7 women)</b>

Focus group	Date	Location	Stakeholders	No. of participants		
				Total	Men	Women
1 (mixed)	1 Feb.	Malakal	Red Cross volunteers	6	4	2
2 (men)	1 Feb.	Malakal	Community leaders and aid recipients	11	11	–
3 (men)	2 Feb.	Kodok	Community leaders and aid recipients	11	11	–
4 (women)	2 Feb.	Kodok	Community leaders and aid recipients	8	–	8
5 (mixed)	2 Feb.	Kodok	Red Cross volunteers	5	2	3
6 (mixed)	6 Feb.	Malakal POC site	Community leaders and aid recipients	8	4	4
<b>Total (6 focus groups)</b>			<b>49 (11 volunteers, 38 community leaders and aid recipients)</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Total (27 interviews and 6 focus groups)</b>				<b>79</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>24</b>

IMC = International Medical Corps; IOM = International Organization for Migration; OCHA = UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; POC = Protection of civilians; RC/RC = Red Cross and Red Crescent; RRC = South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission; UNHCR = UN High Commissioner for Refugees; UNICEF = UN Children's Fund.

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